

The forms of value creation in music intermediaries

Intermediation and disintermediation in the music industry

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Master's Thesis June 2018

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Abstract

This thesis project aims to research and analyze the changes that digitalization brought to the music industry while in particular; the research focuses on the forms of value creation in music intermediaries. Accordingly, the qualitative research's target is to investigate the means that music intermediaries use in order to create value, remaining relevant in the era of digitalization and online distribution, where physical record sales tend to disappear. Moreover, the research was designed and based on two theoretical arguments. On one hand a number of writers and researchers that indicate the end of music intermediation as emerging technologies remove the barriers between artists and listeners. For them, this new era of independents, eliminates traditional monopolies in music production and consumption such as the record labels and the radio. On the other hand, many suggest that digitalization brings new aspects in the music industry as it creates new necessities. Therefore this projects aims to dive deeper in the changes that digital technology brings in the field of music intermediation as well as the transformations that music intermediaries have to confront. Thus, through a holistic approach to music intermediation, the research tried to investigate how music intermediaries continue to create value in an uncharted period where new models of music consumption, such as Spotify or YouTube, emerge.

Furthermore, the research approach was based on the importance of traditional or new gatekeepers in the field of music business as well as the elements that help them to remain sustainable for the industry. Thus, through ten exploratory expert interviews, relevant questions based on a given literature were asked. Subsequently, music intermediaries from several types of companies such as record labels, music media, radio or live events operators were contacted and answered questions based on given themes. Hence, concepts like the “digitalization of record industry», the “necessity of contemporary intermediation” and the” positive or negative aspects of digital transformation in music intermediaries”, were explored throughout the interviews. Ultimately, besides the methods that music intermediaries use in order to remain relevant in the music industry, this project also wants to fuel the conversation regarding intermediation in the larger spectrum of media, culture and entertainment. Similarly, as the web creates new frames in creation and distribution, it challenges simultaneously, the role of intermediaries not only in music but in several fields such as media and creative industries.

Keywords: digitalization, intermediaries, intermediation, music, media, digital transformation, music industry, music business

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my honest appreciation to my thesis supervisor Dr. Erik Hitters of Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication, who gave me the confidence to achieve any given task while he listened and evaluated my ideas with respect and understanding. I would like to thank the interviewees for their time and the valuable insights they offered. Furthermore, I have to acknowledge my classmates from the Erasmus University of Rotterdam for turning Netherlands into my second home. Finally, I must express my gratitude to my family for literally giving everything they had in order to help me follow my dreams. I will always be grateful.

In loving memory of Spiros Metaxas

Andreas Periklis Metaxas, June 2018.

1. Introduction

1.1 The music industry in the digital era - A new need for intermediation.

The music business has been a crucial part of creative industries since the release of the first phonograph models by T. Edison and Columbia in 1896, while sound recording has also been a constantly growing form of mass media (Gronow, 1983). Subsequently, in the past century, music businesses reached a maximum trade value of \$27.3 billion in 1999 (Klein, Meier & Powers, 2016). Significantly, from the beginning of 21st century, the traditional channels of music products' distribution and monetization have been challenged by the rise of digital files and online distribution. Simultaneously, the growth of peer-to-peer networks and the emergence of streaming services shrank the record sales as the Recording Industry Association of America failed to confront illegal digital file sharing (Lam & Tan, 2001), whereas the introduction of social media along with web 2.0 suggested a new way of direct distribution, where music artists and producers could reach their audiences without the help of traditional distributors (Preston & Rogers, 2011).

During the traditional era of the music industry, the only way for a music creator to gain access to the mass public was a contract with a record intermediate. As the traditional music production model projects, a record contract would offer accessibility to recording units, event management, advertising, and ultimately was compulsory in order to distribute the music product to the stores. In a new digitally formatted ecosystem, where information does not require a hard copy, creators have the chance to upload their own recordings and communicate their messages themselves. Thus, the traditional music business was disrupted in several aspects (Wikström & DeFillippi, 2016). At first, listeners did not have to buy CDs anymore, since the desired music was either illegally available online or it could easily be copied and transmitted. At second, a new wave of aspiring artists could now pursue its way to monetization and in some cases to stardom, only with the help of the web (Vaccaro & Cohn, 2004). A recent significant example of this new potential is the case of "Chance the Rapper", a hip-hop artist who in 2017 became the first Grammy award winner without a record contract, exclusively by distributing his music for free online. A case that pushed the American recording academy to allow nominations from albums that have been available exclusively in online platforms such as Spotify and Apple music (Havens, 2018). As Hesmondhalgh and Meier detected (2015), the aforementioned facts created a new form of "web utopianism" suggesting that the erasing of traditional distributing services meant the end of intermediate services in the music industry as creators would be able to skip any middle services towards their listeners. Nonetheless, according to the annual IFPI report (2017) traditional record companies, worldwide, invest virtually 4.5 billion US dollars in research and development while they are the traditional gatekeepers as regards copyrights and licensing. Moreover, the three traditional major record companies, Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music Group, and Warner Music Group, still hold the 62,4% of industry's total revenue from digital or physical sales of pre-recorded music, according to MIDiA Research (2016). The emergence of the "360 deal", a new policy of business operation which allows music companies to request a percentage of artists' ancillary revenue streams such as merchandise, tours, and publishing (Marshall, 2013), is an example of new forms that could replace the traditional value creation which CD sales used to offer.

1.2 Research Problem

As the above-mentioned facts indicate, the emergence of digital technology, apart from a decline in music industry's profits, also fueled a conversation among scholars and professionals as regards the necessity of intermediate services in the contemporary music industry. Digitalization of music converted the so-called "do it yourself strategy" from an alternative way of building a music career to a dominating model among aspiring artists (Oliver, 2010). Thus, musicians and producers could now seek after creative freedom by organizing themselves the process of their production chain. Nevertheless, the DIY model has its downside as the process of music production and distribution remains a multifunctional process. Hence, the demands of a constant and efficient music production are so many that in most of the cases artists cannot handle them by themselves despite the forms of accessibility that the web offers (Hracs, 2013). At this point, easy accessibility in music products in combination with the demands that both producers and consumers have, create a space for new intermediaries, where the need for intermediation may remain but this time it is formed in new models (Galluszka, 2015). As Morris remarks (2015), an example of the emerged new demands is the recommendation algorithms that many streaming services offer. In this way, streaming platforms fulfill the demand for cultural curation that online listeners have. At this point, it is vital to research to what extent it is valid that music creators do not need intermediaries anymore in order to monetize their product as DIY (do-it-yourself) tends to be a dominating model in the music industry. (Rodgers, 2015). Subsequently, as the aforementioned facts suggest, despite the massive digital changes, traditional record companies still collect the majority of music revenue while monetization remains an obstacle without the fulfillment of multiple demands that both producers and consumers have. Subsequently, the proposed research will be based on the following propositions:

Proposition 1: Intermediaries are still necessary value generators in the music production chain.

Proposition 2: The rise of the web changed the traditional ways of creating value in the music industry, hence music intermediaries have been forced to reconstruct their value capturing strategies.

Proposition 3: Despite the rise of direct distribution, music creators cannot make a considerable financial profit without intermediaries.

1.3 Research Question.

Apart from the initial enthusiasm regarding the democratization of music distribution and the case of disintermediation that the development of web 2.0 brought (Bernardo & Martins, 2014), many voices suggest that is more a period of re-intermediation than the actual end of intermediaries. (Galuszka, 2015). Furthermore, Chircu and Kauffman indicated (1999) that the process of web development, along with the emerging e-commerce intermediaries, will lead several industries to a circle of "intermediation-disintermediation-re-intermediation" where either new intermediaries will compete against the traditional ones or respectively the traditional intermediaries will try to re-invent their business model in order to adapt in the new needs. Accordingly, the proposed thesis project aims to research the following research questions:

RQ: "In which ways do music intermediaries add value in music's production chain?"

Subsequently, in order to effectively frame the research as well as to gain an in-depth insight, the following research sub-questions will be researched:

Research sub-question 1: Are music intermediates still a necessity for the music production chain?

Respectively, upon this question, the research will try to examine in what extend intermediates remain necessary for the dominating online music distribution?

Research sub-question 2: At which stages do intermediates add value in the music production value chain?

At this point, the project will aim at conclusions regarding the beneficial and detrimental aspects of changes in the music industry as well as the parts of music value chain that has been benefited by intermediates. For example, as Marshall indicates (2015), modern streaming services such as Spotify, undermine creators' profits by implementing unfair revenue sharing policies. Accordingly, answers to similar cases will be examined.

Research sub-question 3: Has the role of traditional intermediates changed?

Hence, a detailed research will provide answers regarding the current positioning of traditional intermediate models in the music field.

Thus, throughout this academic research, the current existence of intermediation in the music industry will be discussed as well as the necessity of intermediate services. Ultimately, the new forms of value creation within the music supply chain in relation with the digital re-structure that the web brought, will be the essential core of this research (Graham, Burnes, Lewis & Langer, 2004)

1.4 Social Relevance

The music business is a considerable part of the global media industry as it has a major stream of revenue. Nevertheless, the recent digital developments transformed the needs of consumers and accordingly the structuring of the industry. Additionally, the emergence of social media terminates the traditional distribution services and simultaneously questions the role of gatekeepers as now major distribution channels such as YouTube or Spotify are not only easily accessible to creators without the help of traditional intermediaries but also they have been replacing radio as the most effective means of music consumption. (Benner & Waldfogel, 2016). On the other side, despite the initial revenue decline that the rise of Mp3 file-sharing caused to the industry, the music's company's revenue has been increasing lately as a result of the streaming services. Moreover, as Waldfogel suggests (2017) the digital transformation created numerous opportunities for new products and services in creative industries. Thus, the proposed thesis project sets to investigate the new means of value creation within a changing industry and then to extract a number of conclusions as regards the direction of the contemporary music business.

1.5 Scientific Relevance

Given that the proposed thesis project aims to explore the new framework of the music industry, the research process will meet all the academic standards. Additionally, a deep theoretic approach based on existing literature will provide an essential understanding of the

transformations in the field of music intermediaries and their value production in the digital era. More specifically, the scientific discussion will be built upon arguments regarding the actual impact of digitalization in the music industry. As mentioned above, some scholars argue that digitalization means the end of any intermediate process in the music business while the music production and consumption becomes more democratized as artists become the leaders of their own future and overcome the traditional monopoly of music companies (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2015). On the other hand, others argue that music industry just passes to a phase of re-intermediation where either traditional intermediaries adopt new models in order to adapt in new demands (for instance, collaboration with technology companies) or opportunities are born as digitalization creates a totally new space for value creation (Jones, 2002; Galluszka, 2015; Lam & Tan, 2001). Moreover, the field of music intermediaries and their role in music value chain is a changing field which offers the space for further research (Eiriz & Leite, 2017). At this point, this research aims to add a relevant point as regards the new demands and opportunities as well as the necessities that music intermediaries have to fulfill in order to create value and survive, proving that re-intermediation is, in fact, the next phase of industry's process.

In other words, this research aims to add value in a particular scientific field: the role of intermediaries in creative industries and in the cultural economy always under the impact of digital and new media. As Taylor indicates (2013), the part of intermediate operators, is a crucial aspect of economic and social progress will it helps the development of the creative industries. Hence, cultural intermediation can be analyzed based on three forms: the transactional, the regulatory and the strategic form (Taylor, 2013). At first, the transactional form reflects the relations between social and economic factors. At second the regulatory form stands for the norms that shape the aforementioned transaction and at third, the strategic form reflect the structural standards that push this connections to reproduce as well as to remain valuable (Taylor, 2013). Subsequently, this project focuses on the third form, as it aims to research the elements that make music intermediaries to remain an important aspect for the music market besides the changes that the digital media brought. Furthermore, for Taylor (2013) intermediation is critical for the creative market as it fuels the value definition and re-definition while it regulates communication and economy. Ultimately, Taylor suggests (2013) that Bourdieu's definitions of cultural intermediaries, can now be translated in a modern environment through occupations such as festival organizers, club managers, gallery owners, consultants and journalists. Hence, for this case, the music market consists of intermediaries such as managers, live events promoters, record labels, music journalists, production unit owners. For Negus (2002), the music intermediation is the field between a musician and a listener, which is occupied by promotion, marketing or any other elements that link production to consumption. Therefore, given that digitalization and digital media created new aspects in the ways that music has been produced, promoted and consumed, it is necessary to understand in what degree the value of music intermediation has changed and towards which directions. As Zhu and MacQuarrie indicate (2003), internet's emergence along with the rising popularity of digital music files, led many to believe that digitalization means the complete changeover in music industry's dynamics as traditional procedures have been changing and hence many key gatekeepers will be destroyed towards a new allocation of power. Nonetheless it should be noted, that the impact of digital media influenced several other aspects of entertainment and creative industries and thus it challenges a new participating culture where users can produce, reproduce and allocate content themselves in digital networks questioning in general the traditional barriers that creative industries had (

Benkler, 2006). Therefore, the eventual goal of this research project besides a deep understanding of today's music intermediation is to scientifically participate in a larger conversation regarding the meaning of cultural intermediaries in fields strongly affected by the digital media.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Digitalization

Along with the many changes that the 21st century brought to business, one of the most crucial developments is the digitalization of the music product, as it meant the end of the unit-sales mode where record companies based their revenue on CD's promotion and distribution. Moreover, it signified a major crisis in the recording industry, as its revenue stream, sales, massively declined due to the new aspects of the online activity. At first, illegal file sharing - also known as piracy - was considered to be the number one threat of music business, as music content could now leak for free online or in some other cases be re-sold in copied CD's (Bacache-Beauvallet, Bourreau & Moreau, 2012). At second, the development of peer to peer networks, where now users could transmit music content anonymously, undermined the distributive role of music companies as their physical products were not anymore necessary since listeners could consume music in new ways and most importantly for free.

According to Aquiar and Waldfogel (2016), the transmission of digital music led North American recording revenue to a significant drop of 75% from 1998 up to 2012. Subsequently, the massive sales fall, pushed the industry to pursue new models in order to survive, as it was now compulsory to adapt to the new forms of consumption. Thus, the emergence of streaming services such as iTunes and Spotify as well as the "a la carte" model where now users could buy a track independently, offered a new alternative to music companies and creators towards the monetization of their production (Vaccaro & Cohn, 2004). Ultimately, over the last five years, digital sales have seemed to re-increase music industry's stability. As Joshua Friedlander, vice president, strategic data analysis of RIAA reports (2013) from 2010, music industry's total revenue has remained stable while a proportion of 21.1% comes from digital streaming and 6.1 % from subscription services respectively.

2.2 Cultural intermediaries as an entity.

The initial reference to the role of cultural intermediaries can be seen in Pierre Bourdieu's "Distinction" (1984) where the French sociologist defines them as a middle-class group that is responsible for the formation of culture and taste (Maguire & Matthews, 2010). As Negus remarks (2002), intermediation reflects the concept of a "gatekeeper" who can be seen in several aspects of cultural production, from books' editors who select writers to publish their work to film producers who choose films to invest. Subsequently this research approaches music intermediation holistically as a sphere which occupies a large aspect of the contemporary music industry and hence it is vital to refer to the theoretical background of cultural intermediaries in social sciences. Accordingly, it should be noted that cultural intermediation is a defined field that fuels cultural production and consumption; not only is music but in the entire spectrum of creative industries as it was highlighted by the work of Bourdieu (1986, 1993). Subsequently, Bourdieu's theories on cultural intermediation motivated several writers, to research the importance of cultural intermediation either from sociological or economic perspective and hence, it's a consensus among most researchers that cultural intermediaries are the professionals who operate in between production and consumption within the cultural markets (Hesmondhalgh, 2006).

Furthermore, Bourdieu defines the frames of intermediate participation particularly, although he remains broad as regards the understanding of culture (Hesmondhalgh, 2006). Moreover, as Maguire and Matthews indicate (2012), literature varies as regards a strict definition of the cultural occupations which can be defined as “intermediate” whereas cultural intermediaries can either be defined as professionals who are specialized to persuade audiences to buy cultural products or workers in networks of cultural supply and distribution. Nonetheless, for Negus (2002), cultural intermediaries can be seen as workers in the field of media, arts and entertainment. Hence, as Negus intends to interpret cultural intermediaries in contemporary markets, he sees them as corporate executives in Hollywood, business analysts in media and advertising, accountants in music companies or any other types of individuals who offer their expertise to the cultural market, separating themselves from artists and producers (2002). Subsequently, cultural intermediaries add and manage the value in creative industries whereas they connect consumers with products constructing given markets (Negus, 2002) and ultimately they are responsible for the legitimacy as well as the validity of cultural products (Maguire & Matthews, 2012).

2.3 Traditional Intermediation in the music industry

Similarly, intermediaries have been also a crucial aspect of music industry's evolution. Thus, the most recognizable music intermediaries apart from record stores, distribution companies and media have been the A&R (artists and repertoire) professionals as well as lawyers, accountants and other business affair executives that used to co-exist within music companies (Negus,2010). Subsequently, music companies were based on a centralized content control system, which included expensive production equipment along with the advanced expertise that was needed in order to distribute music products in several channels such as stores or radio.

Furthermore, music industry's existence was dependent on product-based revenues and hence to the traditional dichotomy of producer-consumer. (Hughes & Lang, 2003). As Bockstedt, Kauffman, and Riggins summarize (2005), in traditional music intermediation, record companies earn the majority of revenue as they totally control the value chain. Accordingly, record companies as intermediaries focus on production, manufacturing, distribution, and promotion of the music product while they also have revenue through copyrights' ownership. In addition, other traditional major intermediaries are retail stores which distribute and advertise music products to customers, and copyrights enforcement organizations. (Bockstedt, Kauffman & Riggins, 2005). Moreover, Scott's 2000 work (as cited in Hracs,2013) demonstrates the traditional music intermediation procedure as a complex system based on highly skilled professionals and firms of experts that specialize in business, technical and creative services and thus, the process of industry's production chain is built upon a collaborative model. Additionally, according to Vaccaro and Cohn (2004), the above traditional model of companies' intermediation represents the history of the music industry in the 20th century. Subsequently to that, it should be mentioned that Wikström (2014) distinguishes music industry in three intermediate pillars. At first the record business, which is focused on recording, promoting and distributing records. At second the licensing businesses which are responsible for copyrights negotiations and arrangements and at third the live performance industry which aims at the promotion of concerts and live music shows (Wikström, 2014). Ultimately, it is crucial to understand to what extent digitalization affects the spectrum of high skilled experts and professionals who operate in between the frames of

music production and consumption, whereas the digital transformation in media and communication challenges the given status quo in the industry (Hracs,2012).

2.4 Disintermediation

As the music industry steps into the era of digital information and online networks, new aspects of cultural production and consumption appeared. The technological developments of the 21st century, apart from changing music product's production and terminating the sales of hard copies, also challenged the role of traditional intermediates.(Hracs,2015) Since technically, every home computer could now copy and transmit digital information such as recordings, many predicted the end of intermediation(Young & Collins,2010). An argument that the introduction of web 2.0 fueled, as social media opened a new environment for independent creators who could now perform, exhibit and distribute their music through content platforms and social networks such as Myspace and YouTube. In other words, the highly-sophisticated production and distribution system as well as the promotion channel that music companies offer, was seemingly not a necessity anymore since artists could seek after their own fame online. Cases like the one of Canadian multiplatinum singer Justin Bieber, who was discovered online due to the popularity of his home videos (Mitchell, 2009) or like the popular rock band Radiohead which decided to go independent and distribute their album online receiving only donations, led some to state that traditional intermediate services such as record companies lose their power as the social media rise. (Stone, 2009).

As Clemons, Gu and Lang remark (2016), historically intermediates used to secure their operation by controlling artists' reputation as well as accessibility to recording units whereas the technological development reduced the production expenses up to an extent that threatened the assets of traditional intermediation. Subsequently, top acts also have the financial ability to fund themselves and thus the essential impact of such disintermediation leads to the following remark: On one hand record companies lose the revenue from these acts and on the other independents obtain the maximum wholesale price of their work. (Clemons, Gu, Lang, 2016). At this point, Hracs remarks in 2012 (as cited in Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2015), that the online media offered to creators, considerable self-control of their career in such degree that industry's intermediate structure was disrupted. Additionally, as Hesmondhalgh and Meier indicate (2015) such changes made many to claim, that the role of gatekeepers in the market, was now replaced as intermediate companies were now completely unprofitable. Ultimately, as the evolution of the contemporary music industry provides artists the tools to skip certain intermediaries, it is vital to research and understand the limits as well as the new transformation that this form of "disintermediation" creates while the aforementioned changes could either mean the democratization of the music industry or just the translocation of power (Hracs, 2015).

2.5 Re-intermediation and value creation

Besides those who state that the web would be the end of gatekeepers in the music industry, there are also scholars who claim that digitalization just leads the market to a new form of intermediation. As was mentioned in the introduction, even from 1999, Chircu and Kauffman predicted that digital developments create a process for intermediates, separated into three phases, intermediation, disintermediation and eventually re-intermediation. According to the above, re-intermediation as the third stage will force new online intermediates to provide their technological knowledge to traditional intermediates since that would be easier than compete

with them. According to Hawkins, Mansell and Steinmueller's 1998 prediction (as cited in Jones, 2000), it is possible for the value to be transmitted to new gatekeepers who implement alternative and more sophisticated mechanisms than a complete intermediation. For instance, as Jones remarks (2000), it is more probable that record companies would share their power with the new intermediaries that could provide the technology to distribute the product online. Additionally, as Leyshon, Thrift, Crewe, French and Webb note (2016), the digital era may cause the rise of a new democracy for the music industry but that does not necessarily mean that in democracies everyone participates equally. Thus, a part of music consumers upgrade themselves to intermediaries in the value production chain, as they fund music products through "crowdfunding" as well as co-create and co-edit content. (Leyshon et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, a crucial part of the value chain, creators, seems to need guidance in order to monetize their work, despite the technological advantages and freedom that digitalization gave them, since music monetization is a complex procedure. As Hracs remarks (2012), the need for consultancy and management among creators still exists, yet traditional intermediaries such as managers, adapt to the digital environment and create value by changing their business models towards a more independent aspect. Contrary to the strong ties that music management used to have during the traditional era of intermediation, now managers re-emerge independently by creating value for their clients through more flexible collaboration models. (Hracs, 2012).

According to the above, we conclude that digitalization brings plenty of new opportunities as music intermediaries reposition themselves in the market. As Galluszka indicates (2015) most of the artists lack business affair expertise, a key factor towards product monetization. Moreover, since online music streaming services tend to be the dominating model in music consumption worldwide, a new space for re-intermediation opens. Firms, which take over copyrights settlement between independent artists and major digital stores called, aggregators, are now responsible for collecting and distributing music online. Such companies are now negotiating with both major record labels and independent creators as they operate in the space between production and consumption (Galluszka, 2015).

In addition, as the emergence of 360 deals proves, the digital market can be based in cross-promotional aspects while traditional intermediaries now have to redefine their value sources (and subsequently their operative method), by creating value from more than one activities- as the traditional sales-oriented model suggested (Marshall, 2012). At this point, as a major part of music content is being transmitted on multimedia platform YouTube, another new kind of firm tries to monetize its content by operating as new intermediaries. So called MCN's (multi-channel networks), are companies that try to endorse YouTube creators' content by operating as middlemen between corporations that seek after advertising and YouTube users/content producers. Ultimately, by representing YouTube creators (subsequently many of them are music artists) they manage to achieve cross-promotional revenue streams and monetize digital content (Vonderau, 2016).

2.6 Piracy

Investigating the impact of digitalization along with the mp3 explosion in music intermediation it is vital to focus on the effects of piracy in the contemporary music industry. Thus it is necessary to dive deeper into the results which were caused by illegal file-sharing

practices and subsequently questioned the way that music industry used to handle the music products as well as the different forms of revenue.

As Wikström, indicates (2014), the record business as the strongest pillar of the music industry, based its revenue on distribution whereas the establishment of illegal mp3 platforms signified the beginning of an era where the record companies started losing that monopoly. As Alves and Michael remark (2005), an early precursor of mp3 distribution websites was MP3.com, a network founded in 1998 which allowed users to convert CDs to mp3s after proving that they have product's ownership. That could be feasible either by buying music albums online through the platform or by just adding the product to the CD drive. Hence, MP3.com business model was based on the digitalization of paid music while targeting access to a varied music online catalogue. Nevertheless, soon afterward, Napster introduced the free access to major labels' catalogues without paying the rights holders. It quickly surpassed MP3.com's popularity. Created by Shawn Fanning in 1999, Napster could be defined as the first large illegal file sharing network that left users to exchange music files based on a peer to peer technology (Wikström, 2014). Even though the industry's major companies ran after Napster through lawsuits and long-term litigations, a rising culture of illegal file exchange pushed such networks and platforms to multiply. Thus, the industry had now to face numerous pools of mp3 files that did not meet any licensing or distribution requirements such as Piratebay, Kazaa, Limewire and more (Wikström, 2014). Following that, Napster opened the door for several similar peer to peer services, such as Kazaa, giving users, the additional opportunity to illegally exchange other types of multimedia files besides music.

Subsequently, the illegal file-sharing led the music industry to estimate a massive loss of \$3.1 billion in 2005 while already by 2000, 14% of internet users had downloaded music for free illegally. (Bhattacharjee, Gopal & Sanders, 2003). Additionally, as Bhattacharjee, Gopal and Sanders mention (2003) the piracy phenomenon, based on free files transmission, rose as a result of increasing internet connection speeds while data storage cost had been decreasing simultaneously. Although it should be mentioned that illegal files transmission affected several other fields of entertainment along with music, such as the film industry (Bhattacharjee, Gopal & Sanders, 2003). Yet it should be noted that despite the damage that piracy caused to both music intermediates and producers, several voices argue that offers free advertisement and promotion to aspiring artists as well as the ability for consumers to test the products before purchasing them. (Bhattacharjee, Gopal & Sanders, 2003). Towards that direction, Bacache-Beauvallet, Bourreau, and Moreau analyze (2012) the piracy phenomenon in correlation with the music industry, remarking that if music producers present a high demand for live performance revenue, then piracy helps to increase concerts' attendance as illegal file sharing pushes consumers to discover new artists. Hence, researching the French music industry, Bacache-Beauvallet, Bourreau and Moreau conclude (2012) that independent music artists are found to be more tolerant towards piracy as they focus on its aforementioned positive aspects contrary to traditional record companies. Furthermore, Janssens, Beken, and Vandaele, distinguish piracy (2009) between physical and digital copies exchange. Accordingly, digital piracy can also take separate forms such as website databases, peer 2 peer networks, or file transfer protocol (FTP) pages whereas the rise of the phenomenon can be explained by the increasing prices of music albums (Janssens, Beken & Vandaele, 2009). More specifically, shortly before the digital file outbreak, major record companies increased music albums' price in the US from \$13.04 to \$14.19 per unit during the period 1999-2001

while at the same time, sales' revenue had started to decline. (Janssens, Beken & Vandaele, 2009).

2.7 Streaming services, aggregators, and the new digital market

As online prospects have been developing during the last decade, a new space for music intermediation seems to appear in streaming services and aggregation. Wikström remarks (2014) in front of the mp3 outbreak, the music industry seemed to lack innovative strategies towards the creation of revenue through digital services. Nonetheless, the threshold to an emerging digital market was created by Apple. The American technology company introduced the music industry to a new distribution model with the establishment of iTunes. Subsequently, iTunes applied a new "a la carte" distribution model where users could buy single tracks for less than \$1.00. Moreover, Apple, a non-music enterprise until then, managed to persuade music labels to add their catalogues on iTunes, trying to change online users' behavior towards a legal and more sustainable business model where rights' holders and producers would be able to take full control of their intellectual property through a transparent distribution process. (Wikström, 2014) Eventually, iTunes became a leading player in digital music distribution as in 2013 was found to have sold more than 25 billion songs since its official launch in 2003 (Wikström, 2014). Yet it should be noted that other companies established digital music stores similar to iTunes such as the Amazon mp3 store (Love, 2011). Although, as Mcleod indicates (2005) music companies by embracing this model, turn against their own dominance unavoidably. Hence, they opened the door to other intermediaries to operate in a space which was traditionally occupied by major labels and production companies. In addition, the establishment of such distribution systems, by third party intermediaries, diminishes a traditionally high cost which independent artists and entrepreneurs had to confront in order to enter in the music market (Mcleod, 2005).

Subsequent to the "a la carte" music purchase model which was discussed above, the new digital environment created a space for other types of distribution intermediaries based rather on access than purchase. These services attract listeners through a subscription-based model, offering access to large music catalogues. Thus, by paying a monthly or yearly subscription, listeners can access a copyrighted music library as well as to download records for offline use (Wikström, 2014). Nevertheless, as Wikström mentions (2014), a major obstacle for such type of services, is at first, to persuade major labels to collaborate by giving access to their catalogues and at second, to convince consumers to pay subscriptions in order to use content that they do not own completely. Furthermore, Marshall (2015) distinguishes streaming intermediaries in three different forms of services. Firstly, web radios and online versions of traditional radio stations along with suggestion algorithms where services create automatic playlists based on users' previous preferences. Secondly, "locker services" that offer mobile access to previously uploaded mp3 tracks such as iTunes Match and Amazon "Cloudplayer". Thirdly, the aforementioned streaming model where users can select their desired music files through a licensed database. (Marshall, 2015). At this point, it should be noted that the dominant company in the rising market of streaming intermediaries is Spotify (Wikström, 2014). Found in 2006 by Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon, Spotify initially tried to implement a new business model based on free access to music and advertisement. Thus, in this way it could create a legal process of online music consumption, paying the needed share to right holders. Subsequently, trying to negotiate with major music companies Spotify offered them a part of its shares (Marshall, 2015) whereas evolved its business model to a subscriptions based service giving users two options: One version of the service that is free yet it offers a

limited experience with commercial breaks and another one that let users listen to unlimited music of their choice by paying a monthly subscription (Wikström, 2014). Hence, unlike other streaming services that belong to the above-mentioned forms such as Pandora or Last.fm, Spotify gives listeners the ability to select music on demand. (Richardson, 2014). Nonetheless, as Marshall mentions (2015), despite that Spotify shares 70% of its revenue with record companies, both signed and independent artists take only a minor part of it, questioning service's profitability for musicians. Yet as Vonderau states (2017), Spotify, along with other dominating streaming services such as Apple music and Amazon music, transformed the way that cultural goods have been distributed. Thus Spotify's service is a leading intermediate that connects the interests of different stakeholders' groups such as advertisers, consumers, and producers having a positive impact on music industry's supply and demand. (Vonderau, 2017).

Following the emergence of the aforementioned services, digital distribution created space for even more new intermediates. Hence, the streaming distribution chain passes through particular companies defined as music aggregators (Galuszka, 2015). Music aggregators operate as licensing companies that sign contracts between small or large rights' holders such as independent artists/labels or major music companies. In this way aggregators manage to help streaming services to enlarge their catalogues with licensed music from several smaller players; a process that would be time-consuming for streaming companies if they had to negotiate directly with music producers. (Galuszka, 2015). In addition, music aggregators try to present attractive terms of contract to their rights' holders, ensuring that streaming companies would sign fair negotiations in order to buy their catalogues, decreasing the market's bargain asymmetry (Galuszka, 2015).

2.8 Social media and a new space for music consumption

Online social networks have been another vital aspect of the music industry's digital transformation, changing the terms of transmission, distribution, and consumption. Hence, it is crucial to understand the role of social media in the development of music intermediation. As it was mentioned above, social networks and platforms such as Myspace, Facebook and Youtube, opened the doors for artists to skip traditional intermediates such as radio and television networks, reaching directly audiences and consumers. Thus, it is clear that fields such as promotion, publicity and distribution which were traditionally controlled by particular gatekeepers (Wikström, 2014), were now given to artists openly just through an internet connection. Thus, many argue that social media play a major role in the contemporary music industry while they help artists to be discovered (Preston & Rogers, 2011). Hence, social media promote a "word of mouth" model where artists and music acts build a long-term fan engagement as the power of promotion passes from traditional intermediaries to social networks (Preston & Rogers, 2011). Although, contrary to those who support the complete disintermediation of traditional promotion-channels, a common point among music executives who were interviewed by Preston and Rogers (2011) was that it is still difficult for music artists to reach effective engagement on social media without the help of other traditional intermediates. Additionally, for Dewan and Ramaprasad (2014), social media offer more opportunities in terms of promotion and dissemination to niche music as it more likely to be discovered through social networks and Youtube contrary to mainstream music which traditionally attracts the interests of old intermediaries. Moreover, as Salo, Lankinen and Mäntymäki suggest (2013), social media have been offering direct communication between labels, artists and consumers on a short-term frequency.

At this point, it should be noted that already in the early years of social media, the introduction of Myspace in 2004 gave musicians a new digital space to promote and distribute their work based on the prospects of “online reputation” (Dhar & Chang, 2009). Yet a research by Jean-Samuel and Thomas (2009) indicates that Myspace users were clustered around mainstream artists who were signed by major labels. Hence, the online dynamics of the artists who were active on the network reflected their offline position in the music industry (Jean-Samuel & Thomas, 2009). Ultimately, the establishment of YouTube, also fueled a discussion as regards the visualization of music, transforming the traditional means of music consumption. In particular, Holt indicates (2011) that YouTube changed the way that music companies originally communicated video clips, creating a new space for mass distributed content to independent music artists and labels outside the narrow limits of music television. Therefore as Holt remarks (2011), social media opened the way for the music product to become more visual and hence to help music videos to become independent from traditional gatekeepers. Accordingly, it is crucial to research in which ways the visualization of music is one of the factors that could add value to music intermediation.

2.9 The rise of independent music and the new music management

All the above-mentioned facts indicate that digitalization challenged the role of music industry’s gatekeepers opening the doors for mass entrance in music production and distribution. Hence it is vital to investigate to what extent, the transformed dynamics in music business created new opportunities for existed or new intermediates to make profit. or Hracs (2012), traditionally music professionals were clustered around major labels as they provided the needed technological and financial infrastructure. As Hesmondhalgh and Meier indicate, independence in records’ intermediation has played a major role even in the pre-internet years. Therefore, several independent labels were credited for the evolution of different genres such as Prestige and Riverside in Jazz, Atlantic in soul, Death Row and Def Jam in hip-hop whereas the emergence of the Punk and the new wave scene in the late 1970’s was a key development in the evolution of music independence (Hesmondhalgh and Meier, 2015).

Subsequently, the digital transformation in the early 2000’s pushed a new generation of music professionals to become active in the cultural sector, motivated by ideas such as “art for the art” contrary to a market that requires recoupable sales and based on the new independent distribution system that the web promotes. (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2015). Additionally, as Hracs remarks (2012), contrary to significant periods for the music industry’s development such as the 1970’s or the 1980’s, in the contemporary digital environment the field has been changing. Hence, digitalization gave music producers the means to be independent. In other words, music production can now take place in home facilities through low-cost software. Moreover, procedures such as mastering, mixing or editing can now be done with personal computers, giving musicians the chance to do it themselves (Hracs, 2012). Thus, the aforementioned transformations displaced some chronic barriers in music production and distribution such as cost and technical ability, giving the opportunity to artists, for the first time in industry’s history, to produce, promote and distribute their music independently (Hracs, 2012). Significantly, as Karubian remarks (2009) the digitalization questioned the traditional role of major labels up to such extent that David Byrne from the American band the “Talking Heads” stated that records could now be made just by the cost of a laptop computer”. Consequently, for Hracs, 2012, independent music production turned from a limited market to a mainstream to a dominant element of the music business. Eventually, for Hesmondhalgh and Meier (2015), this new form of music independence, shifts

intermediation, from record major companies to the Silicon Valley and the IT industry as the independent scene passes now through the gatekeepers of the digital world. At this point, it should be noted that besides the rise of independent music production and distribution, digitalization pushes another group of active stakeholders to reinvent themselves in a more independent way. As the contemporary music field becomes more complex, independent artists have to handle multiple aspects of the music business whereas they do not have the needed qualification, especially as regards business execution and strategy (Hracs, 2015). Consequently, along with the rise of independent musicians and producers, there is an increasing demand for independence in the field of music management. As Hracs remarks (2015), music managers try to re-establish their role in music industry exploiting the independence that digitalization offers. Hence, after the massive management redundancies, that took place in record labels during the industry's transformation, independent managers become again key players in the music's production chain (Hracs, 2015). Ultimately, a new generation of music executives analyzes and interprets the function as well as the demands of the music industry away from the supervision of the record companies. Subsequently, music managers are now in a position to offer services such as strategy creation and consultancy to artists independently (Hracs, 2015).

2.10 The "360-deal" as a new revenue stream for intermediates

Trying to understand the changes that digitalization brought to traditional intermediaries as regards the revenue streams, it is key to research the role of the 360-deal, a new form of contract which has been recently applied by major music intermediaries. As Karubian indicates (2009) the 360 deal is record industry's effort to obtain more of signed artists' revenue whereas record companies confront it as a solution to the crisis that the digital transformation caused in the music business. In other words, 360 types of contracts indicate that record companies can take a share out of live events, merchandise, licensing or other streams that could create revenue for an artist (Marshall, 2012). In addition Karubian remarks (2009) that the 360-deal has been used not only by record intermediates but by another type of intermediaries such as the event and venue operator Live Nation while these type of contracts become a dominant model for the industry.

Furthermore, Marshall (2012), states that the 360 deal is now the standard model in records' intermediation. Moreover, he distinguishes (2012) 360 contracts between "active" and "passive". Thus, an "active" 360 deal means that the record company will actively try to operate in other aspects of artist's career such as merchandise or live promotion and subsequently take a share out of the revenue. Contrary to that, a "passive" 360 deal indicates that a company can collect a share of artist's other activities besides records, (e.g. licensing) without actively managing them (Marshall 2015). Hence, record industry's basic argument is that- in any case -they are responsible for artists' commercial success in several other fields apart from record sales. (Marshall 2015). For Passman (2009), the 360 deal indicates that record companies changing from traditional intermediaries to "artist- build" companies and thus they want to be in charge for every single aspect in an artist's career. As it was mentioned above the 360 deal turns to a standard type of intermediation for the record companies, yet it does not seem totally profitable so far whereas it is mostly applied to new and aspiring artists who would need time to evolve their presence (Passman, 2009). For Stahl and Meier (2012), the 360 deal is consequently a result of digitalization, indicating the need for the record companies, or other types of intermediates, to adapt in the new environment. In addition to that, digitalization helped another field of music artists' activity to expand such as

merchandising and licensing and hence record companies try to seize shares of these developing markets (Stahl & Meier, 2012). Ultimately, the 360 deal could be considered a vital change in the way that records' intermediation handles the industry. Consequently, the 360 deal helps the record business to assure stability as well as adaptability in a changing world, while music intermediaries can participate in the expanding ranges of a digitalized music reality (Stahl & Meier, 2012). Nonetheless, such type of music intermediation targets to increase centralization and oligopolies in the industry whereas they reflect polarization of power as regards revenue's sustainability (Stahl & Meier, 2012).

2.11 Live music intermediation

As it was mentioned above, live music is one of music industry's major revenue channel and accordingly, concert and tour operators can be considered major intermediaries. According to Wikström (2014), live music is one of the industry's aspects that was not affected negatively by digitalization. Furthermore, despite that live music intermediation had a long history since music industry's establishment; it had the second lead compared to the record business while labels perceived tour management as a great promotional stream. (Wikström,2014). Roles were changed as digitalization transformed the dynamics of music's revenue whereas record companies lost the control of distribution. Thus, several features, helped live music to surpass the records industry, in terms of revenue, during the last decade. Significantly, world's largest music intermediate is currently an event operator, Live Music which was developed out of the radio company "Clear Channel Entertainment" (Karubian, 2009; Wikström, 2014). That became feasible as the sales' decline pushed the industry to balance its revenue through other sources such as live events, while tours' income could be controlled easier compared to distribution (Wikström, 2014). For instance, it should be noted that during the mp3 outbreak in the period 2000-2005, the revenue from live music was multiplied almost by two in US and France (Brousseau, 2008).

Moreover, as Bennet indicates (2015), live concerts offer an "offline" experience that helps listeners to adopt a fan identity. Furthermore, digitalization created a space where live music events were enhanced through social media and forums as the web provided several digital tools to promote live music participation such as blogging (Bennet, 2015). Therefore, we could assume that as the revenue from physical music products declines so the revenue from live music show increases. For example, reports indicate that the general revenue from music live shows in Britain rose from £27.7 million in 2015 up to £30.9 in 2017 (Ellis-Petersen,2017). Ultimately, as Waldfogel indicates (2012) the increasing independence of production and distribution that the web caused, besides the enhancement of new business models it also increases the music production in general. Subsequently, the new digitalized and massive recorded music creates an increasing demand for live events (Waldfogel, 2012). Thus, in the research section, the changes and the developments that digitalization brought in live music intermediation will be researched.

3. Method

3.1 Research Design

As this master thesis project aims to research the current developments and the forms of value creation in music intermediates, an exploratory approach was used, in which several groups of professionals within the music field will be interviewed. In simple words, we tried to research how music intermediates handle digitalization and which are the factors that help them to remain relevant for the industry as well as to ensure their viability in the music market. Hence in order to dive deeper, in such a constantly changing field, exploratory expert interviews were considered the best method to have an overview of the current changes as well as a proper way to reach the orientation of the topic (Littig & Pöchhacker, 2014). Thus, experts are defined as people who have a particular type of knowledge and expertise in a certain field (Littig & Pöchhacker, 2014). In addition experts do not only provide useful insights regarding particular aspects but they can also interpret as well as to document several phenomena whereas exploratory expert interviews give researchers the opportunity to gain access in changing fields or fields that have not been efficiently understood (Littig & Pöchhacker, 2014). Hence based on given theory, exploratory expert interviews can be conducted in an open manner, helping us to record the changes as well as the current conditions in music intermediation and offering an interpretative approach in areas that could not be reached with other methods such as surveys or experiments (Littig & Pöchhacker, 2014). Furthermore this paper aims to research both the changes of intermediate practices in the music field as well as the new business models that intermediate music companies adopt in order to adapt in the new digital environment.

The set of companies that were researched, ranged from “business to business” type of companies- where the corporative goal is to provide services to music creators exclusively-to “artists to consumption” companies where their services help producers and artists to reach their audiences effectively. As regards the aforementioned qualitative research method, expert interviews were chosen as the most proper way to examine in depth a complex issue such as the ever changing role of intermediate music business within the music market (Marshall,1996). More specifically, representatives and executives from various businesses that operate in the intermediate field of the music industry were targeted trying to answer in which ways digitalization influences the intermediate music companies and how they add value for their stakeholders.(Galuszka,2015).

Given that the theoretical framework indicates that digitalization brought numerous changes and challenges in the whole field of music intermediation, expert intermediaries from several music companies such as record labels and live events operators were contacted. At this point, it should be noted that as this research aims to approach the developments that digitalization brought to the field of the music business; therefore the current process of value creation in the industry will be examined. Moreover, this thesis project aims to dive deeper in the current value as well as the developments of music intermediates and the current transformation in the field of the music business which is the larger framework. Thus the final findings will be presented in comparison with previous academic publications and theoretical concepts. Hence, the reader has the chance to see in which direction the industry's needs as well as its necessities have been changed due to the tremendous evolution that the web brought in music production, distribution, consumption and promotion(Hracs, 2012).

3.2 Sampling

The data samples were taken through exploratory expert interviews (Littig & Pöchhacker, 2014) as the project aims to detect the unexplored changes in the field of music intermediation. Thus the methods of sampling was criterion sampling, as the paper focuses to research industry professionals who meet particular requirements as regards their background and work experience (Patton, 2001) Moreover in order to reach such interviewees easily, snowball sampling was also used as interviewees were asked to recommend other professionals who meet the given requirements (Patton, 2001). Subsequently, the research targets music intermediaries, and intermediate music business executives in order to document their expertise and to receive in depth answers regarding the ways that music intermediaries add value in music market as well as the challenges and the transformations they face. Accordingly, the main criteria for the experts' selection were their prior work on the field and experience. Thus, it should be noticed that the research aims to approach holistically the given field. Thereby contacting music representatives from the whole space of music intermediation can provide a complete picture of how digitalization affected the entire sector along with the interactions that take place within the field. Additionally such a holistic approach along with the theoretical documentation sheds light on how digitalization changes the dynamics and the position of gatekeepers in the music industry's landscape. Accordingly, music intermediaries were interviewed in order to provide data with their opinion on the challenges of music intermediation as well as the transformation and the changes that have to encounter in order to survive. Interviews as research method offer also the opportunity to understand their views along with their estimation on the given phenomena (Patton, 2001) whereas it should be noted that the sample reached the desired level of saturation, as after a certain point, interviewees repeated several common conceptual patterns. Based on the above, the following is a list of businesses whose representatives were targeted in order to provide qualitative data:

1. Music labels

As literature indicates, record labels were for years the most vital aspect of music intermediation as well as a crucial aspect of cultural and economic transactions within the industry. Thus representatives from labels were reached in order to present their perspective as regards the impact of digitalization in industry's interactions along with the intermediate field.

2. Event management services

As another vital part of music intermediation, live music operators are major intermediaries who interact with several other parts of the industry such as music media, record companies while they are responsible for artists' performance and promotion.

3. Production units

Although for some the lines of music intermediation might be blurred, we approached music intermediation as field where experts who provide technical expertise as well as consultancy to artists can be seen (Negus, 2002). Thus recording studios and music video companies were considered crucial parts of music intermediation as they are responsible for music product's production, distribution and promotion.

4. Traditional or new music media

Media such as music television and radio were for years the main streams of artists' advertisement and promotion. Subsequently as the project suggests, new technologies brought new intermediaries in this fields such as web sites and blogs. Accordingly representatives from the entire spectrum were contacted in order to document the discussed phenomena.

3.3 Operationalization

Since the research aims to research the ways of value creation in music intermediation, interviews were focused on the tendencies in music business' practices as well as their importance or the transformations that they face. Accordingly, the main concepts which were discussed during the interviews will be:

The current forms of intermediation and their necessity in the contemporary music industry.

The massive release of digital files creates a new chaotic condition in online competition. Hence, we can see the increasing need for regulation while middle services such as aggregators or promotion companies, aim at managing the gap between streaming services or social media platforms and major labels or independent artists (Galluszka, 2015). Similarly, as YouTube rises to a powerful multifunctional media platform, where many music artists base their audience, a new form of intermediate firms called MCN (multi-channel networks) monetizes YouTube content helping creators to endorse their products as well as to manage cross-promotional deals with other stakeholders (Vonderau, 2016). Subsequently, the project aims to discuss the concept of the new changes in this intermediate field where new forms of value extraction can be created through the transformation of aspects such as distribution and promotion.

Digitalization of musical products.

The rise of the web along with the release of several illegal sharing platforms such as Napster, in the beginning of 21st century, caused a shakedown to the music industry and challenged its future. From that threshold and on, music product can be easily copied and transmitted online, a crucial factor that led hard unit sales to a massive decline as illegal file sharing was easily accessible from users all around the world. Contrary to that, several scholars argued that the actual results of illegal sharing and digitalization on music industry's revenue were not that detrimental, (Bhattacharjee et al., 2007) Thus, throughout the proposed project, the actual impact of music products' digitalization will be also discussed.

Financial profit and value proposition in a changing industry.

Since the new online ecosystem has been challenging the stability of music industry with the introduction of new services such as streaming platforms and social media, the music industry has been forced to seek after new policies towards its revenue enhancement. The introduction of 360 contracts, a new financial strategy where music companies have the right to collect profits from artists' other activities such as advertisements and merchandise, indicates that the new digital frames may create also new opportunities. (Stahl & Meier, 2012)

The adoption of new digital developments by traditional music businesses and music professionals.

As Waldfogel indicates (2015), digitalization caused a form of disintermediation to many traditional services, which were replaced by new less expensive channels. Contrary to traditional necessities, both independent artists and record labels can now use online platforms to advertise and distribute their products with lower and sometimes zero expenses. Additionally, in many cases, artists have discovered my major labels through streaming platforms. Therefore, it is vital to detect, how music professionals and music business, adopt new digital developments in order to monetize their product.

3.4 Data Collection

For the needs of this research, the number of set interviewees has been set to 10 as it is a feasible number of interviews that can be conducted in a time span of 3 months. The core of data collection was professionals from the field of the music business, such as both traditional and new intermediaries A full list of the interviewees is included in Appendix.. Furthermore, interviews were recorded as sound files via a microphone connected to a mobile device. Afterwards, data were transferred and transcribed through transcription software. In addition, through a qualitative thematic analysis, the data were coded and presented towards a better understanding of the topic. Interviews were chosen as a research method as the project aims to investigate the core of the up to date changes in the music business along with in-depth insights of the current profit creation in an industry that was changed dramatically with the introduction of digital media. (Hracs, 2013). Moreover, in the shake of practicality as a broader network of intermediaries would be reached easier in Greece during the given period, Greek intermediaries were contacted. Furthermore, as in depth understanding requires language capability; interviews with music intermediaries who operate in Greece took place in their native language. Thus as multilingualism is an essential aspect of expert interviews (Littig & Pöchhacker, 2014), conversations with Greek experts were chosen as they could ideally express themselves better in their native language. Furthermore, each interview's duration will be 30 to 45 minutes, meeting all the academic guidelines. Interviewees were selected according to their professional legitimacy through online and network research and were initially contacted via email or telephone calls. Additionally, apart from "face to face" interaction, some interviews were conducted via telephone or other online means of voice communication, solving in some cases, the problem of distance and location. It should be noted that all of the interviewees had the option to remain anonymous as regards the project's records. After the initial data collection and transcription, the extracted material was analyzed through a deductive thematic analysis. As Braun and Clarke suggest (2006) thematic analysis is a flexible analytical approach ideal for researchers who conduct their first qualitative researches. Subsequently, the useful transcribed data will be coded and categorized under the themes and the concepts which were analyzed in the theoretical framework of this paper. Ultimately, the relevance, the categories and the extracted data in relation to the research questions and sub-questions as well the interpretation and the conclusions are discussed in the results section.

3.5 Limitations, Validity and Reliability

At this point, in order to guarantee the objectivity of the research, it is vital to mention the limitations of the selected qualitative method as well as the weaknesses of this research. Initially it should be mentioned that representatives from licensing and publishing companies were not included in the research as this particular kind of intermediaries requires in depth knowledge of copyrights' law and legal restrictions in order to be analyzed efficiently.

Moreover, apart from the targeted industry's business fields, particular music intermediaries were not confirmed in advance before the composition of the theoretical framework. Thus, the interviewees list was built upon the given theory. As each research interview requires a considerable amount of time, the interviews with selected individuals were rescheduled while the appointments as well as the interviews themselves needed a particular time to be confirmed and scheduled. In addition, interviews could not be arranged before the dissertation proposal completion. Yet in any case, the interviews' procedure took place within the given deadlines. Another limitation as regards interviews process is the lack of anonymity. As interviews require a personal interaction, it is possible for some of the selected interviewees to present biased answers. (Qu & Dumay, 2011). Ultimately, since the interviews took place in Greece or via Skype or Telephone with intermediaries who operate in Greece, will not accurately reflect the current developments in a global scope or in powerful markets such as USA or UK which are considered the heart of contemporary music industry (Power & Hallencreutz, 2007). Nevertheless, USA an UK as powerful music industries are the one end of the global music production chain while the other end is based on regional music markets with limited music export (Hitters & van de Kamp, 2010). Yet it should be noted that local European music markets present a tendency to consume domestic music as their local industries have been increasing since the 1990's (Hitters & van de Kamp, 2010). Moreover as Ferreira and Waldfogel indicate (2013) despite globalization, European music market continue to have a prominent consumption of domestic music. Although, since this project examines music intermediation through the scope of digitalization and digital media, it is crucial to understand how the new digital transformation also influences domestic music markets. Subsequently, Greece has an active music scene with long history of domestic music production with popular genres such as "Rebetika" and "New wave laika" whereas in 2009, 63% of popular music sales in Greece came from domestic repertoire (Elafros,2013). Therefore, the extracted data and conclusions will portray how the Greek market handles the changes in the music industry always in correlation with the European market.

Moreover, in the theoretical framework we take as given the fact that the changes in the music industry's interaction with intermediaries in terms of promotion, consumption, management or distribution are universal, since they follow the global technological developments. Nevertheless it is common sense that, considering any given domestic market like Greece, the margin of profit might differ. However, this research focuses on the way that music intermediaries handle and survive in digitalization rather than a detailed financial analysis of their revenue. Furthermore, some domestic markets managed to become friendly environments for changes in music intermediation and even gave birth to new business models since the beginning of digitalization (Vaccaro & Cohn, 2004).The case of Spotify, the premium streaming service which was founded in Sweden in 2008, is a good example of how the European market can also be considerable as regards music industry's developments (Plummer, 2018). Ultimately, since this research had a holistic approach, as it was mentioned above, it tried to investigate the changes that music intermediation encounters as a totality while it aimed to clarify the power allocations and variations within intermediaries and accordingly within the industry. Thus the results' process aimed at the common grounds that were extracted from the interviewees while it focused on the patterns' creation as regards the value and relevance of the intermediate business in the digital era.

3.6 Interviews

As it was mentioned above, in order to research the above mention concepts, expert interviews were conducted in order to explore the given research problem in correlation with the theoretical framework and the research question. Hence, a general interviews guide was made based on the theoretical concepts which were explored throughout the thesis's design. Thus, open questions were segmented under particular theoretical themes along with introductory questions regarding the interviewees' services and professional background. Thus it was feasible to understand their exact role within the industry. In addition, upon the dialogue with interviewees, more precise questions came up in order to understand in depth the aspects of the discussed topics. Sub-questions such as "why does this happen" or "what do you mean by that" where asked in order to clarify the interview's context as well as to dive deeper in the given terms and topics. At this point, it should be noted that strictly scientific or sophisticated terms were avoided during the conversations. Thus as Patton (2001) indicates it is necessary for the interviewees to understand the context of the conversation along with the disused meaning. See the appendix x for the interviews guide as it was composed for the interviews along with the open questions which were asked throughout the interviews process.

3.7 Analysis.

Given that the goal is to make concrete conclusions along with a reliable interpretation of the data, the chosen analysis method was thematic analysis. As Boyatzis indicates (1998) the thematic analysis offers to researchers the opportunity to identify as well as to observe a large variety of given data in a methodical way, developing precision, sensitiveness and conceptual clarification. Ultimately, thematic analysis allows to link given theory with the data while it gives the chance to present the extracted information in an understandable way (Boyatzis, 1998).

As the core purpose of this research is to identify in what extend does theory applies to the challenges as well as the transformations of music intermediation, the approach of the interviews will be deductive. Thus as it can be seen in the interviews guide, the direction of the conversations was shaped by given themes and concepts extracted from the theoretical framework. For example as the introduction indicates that this paper has a proposition regarding the necessity of intermediaries and hence questions on the elements that make intermediate services still a vital part of the music market were asked (Braun & Clarke, 2008). In other words, the interviews tried to confirm the observations that the theory provided as well as to extract further explanation and documentation (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Moreover, based on that, the approach to the data will be semantic as the research's target is to make a link between the stated ideas or literature and the challenges as well as the developments that music intermediaries confront. Therefore questions were direct and clear seeking after answers to the particular issues that the theory set (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Ultimately, as data were presented in the results' chapter, they were separated in themes and subthemes.

3.8 Coding

Subsequent to the data collection is the coding process of the data. Thus the coding procedure was based on initially on open coding and then on axial and selective coding (Boeije,2010) In

addition, as Braun & Clarke indicate (2008) several steps were followed throughout the data coding such as numerous data reviews while initial data codes were given. Afterwards, based on the given codes, themes were extracted whereas after multiple themes' reviews the concept was segmented in concrete concepts with given code names. Ultimately the extracted analysed material was compared with the given literature. More specifically, as regards the coding process, during open coding, codes were given based on the concepts that the interviewees spoke about as well as the described challenges and phenomena. Subsequently in the axial coding the codes were separated in different segments with clear definition and properties (Boeije, 2010). Ultimately, with selective coding, we have the chance to connect the extracted themes with each other along with the theory. Therefore in the results chapter, it will be possible to present as well as to interpret the finding in the researched field as well as to make conclusions based on the data (Boeije, 2010). See the appendix for an example of this research's coding process.

4. Results

4.1 Transformation in music intermediaries

The case of record labels

The main goal of the interviews was to research the changes in music intermediation as well as to understand how music intermediation still adds value in a digitalized music industry, recording simultaneously the changes, the obstacles and the opportunities which intermediates face. Hence, sub-themes were segmented under certain major themes that were detected during the literature research as well as the conversations with the interviewees. A common theme among all of the interviewees was that the traditional role of record labels has been challenged, while many doubted if record labels can even be still relevant. As it was seen in the theoretical framework, traditional intermediaries such as record companies used to control the whole process of production and distribution earning the majority of industry's revenue while they were the main gatekeepers towards a successful music career (Kauffman, & Riggins, 2005). Although, many interviewees either focused on the record industry as a transformed player or they doubted about its current relevance. P. Vinakos, head director of a production unit, mentioned that record labels' power was declined to an extent where most of the revenue comes from live events while they have reduced their activities as regards artists' development, aiming mostly at artists who already have a certain kind of reputation:

“The record labels have been collapsed, more money is coming out of live events, in the past albums' production was a field absolutely separated than live music. Most of the record labels are now operate as booking agencies”

Meanwhile the same interviewee doubted if the meaning of record label is still relevant for the industry whereas the services that labels provide cannot be correlated with particular value as distribution can be obtained directly and even illegally. As he significantly mentioned, the audience which used to be “customers” now tend to download albums and music even before record companies proceed to distribution. Clearly, this can be correlated with major issues and obstacles that digitalization brought to record intermediaries such as piracy, a critical phenomenon that, according to Wikstrom (2014), directly affected record industry's key function: distribution.

Three interviewees argue that on one hand digitalization eliminates distribution, while on the other there are still some aspects that a traditional record label can be relevant for, such as online promotion and funding in order to visualize efficiently the record. For A. Konstantaras founder of a record label and music journalist, music distribution is a field where individuals can now take over themselves through music aggregators. Here A. Konstantaras echoed Galluszkas's findings (2015) regarding online aggregation; an emerging aspect that reflects the new needs that digitalization creates.

“A disc will be bought up by 10 people. Even if the company has the practical distribution customers will not get it. At Spotify in two days, you and I are coming in. You enter at CD baby (aggregator platform) and upload them, you just pay 30 euros a year and you get in. Distribution is something that you can do yourself, for me what counts is the promo. The only thing a label can offer in practice is the promo. To put you in a radio station”

At this point, it should be noted that for the majority of interviewees, the aspect of distribution was a vital part of record companies which now has been collapsed contrary to promotion. As the terms of music consumption have been changed, online engagement and promotion for music artists remain difficult without the help of traditional media (Preston & Rogers, 2011), an area that is still occupied by record labels. As T. Zervakis, a head director of a production unit and independent label founder, mentions, the internet is a constantly changing field where the terms of promotion can be transformed anytime, whereas the access to traditional media, which is something offered by record companies, can guarantee longevity for artists' reputation.

“Let's assume Facebook, changes something in its terms of usage, and many accounts were closed. You are losing audience just like that. In another case, through a record company, you would keep this audience. Because the doors you would have on the other media would still be open and in full rotation”

Subsequently, the record industry can be seen as a set of transforming companies whereas digital platforms along with the social media could become major stakeholders toward reinvention. While the results of the mp3 crisis (Hracs, 2015; Wikström, 2014) now belong to the past as regards revenue, social media and streaming platforms can work in favor of records intermediation. For A. Villiotis, head director of Feelgood Records, former international A&R director and former commercial director in Sony Music Entertainment., the record industry faced a massive decline during the past decade as a result of piracy (Bacache-Beauvallet, Bourreau & Moreau, 2012), while payed mp3 downloads did not bring the estimated profits. Nevertheless, the same interviewee indicates that the decline has been counterbalanced lately by the rise of streaming services which help record companies to increase their sales' numbers:

“The last three years, the discography has seen an increase after many years, and indeed the numbers of 2017 brought us back many decades in terms of revenue increase, for example England saw an increase in the late 90's era, let's say. I think streaming has proven to be the key for the record labels to reboot I would say”

In addition, record executives can collaborate with social media such as YouTube which initially provided some prospects regarding royalties and monetization. As the same interviewee continues, music markets such as the British one, through streaming, managed to achieve growth rates similar to 1998 whereas as more popular and massive streaming services become so the revenue for the labels increases. The above reflect the report by RIIA's vice president Joshua Friedlander in 2013 which indicates that the revenue from digital sales as well as stream plays has been steadily increasing. Accordingly, it seems that record labels neglect physical sales as digital distribution dominates the industry while they seek for new channels to monetize their product. As many of the above facts indicate, transforming record companies tend to occupy new fields in order to remain relevant, besides digital distribution, such as access to live events or merchandising (Marshall, 2012). As A. Villiotis indicated, a record company can offer access to festivals while besides marketing or promotion of records, labels operate in association with event bookers or managers while it seeks for new channels to monetize its products. Similarly, the aforementioned example of the rising digital platforms reflects the emergent of new alternatives towards music's monetization as Vaccaro and Cohn remarked (2004). Moreover, online communication offers to many labels the opportunity to promote new re-establish older products such as vinyl records and cassettes. As A.

Konstantaras mentions labels can now target at trends such as vintage nostalgia and produce cassettes which can be distributed online in a global scale:

“Even “Inner Ear”, the biggest indie music record label in Greece, is now releases tapes. Now it can distribute albums from vinyl to cassette releases”

As the same interviewee continues for particular music audiences, products such as vinyl records or cassettes have collectible value and thus the communicational frames that social media offer gives to smaller labels the opportunity to promote as well as to distribute such products to collectors all over the world, a factor that becomes an alternative to the digital platforms (such as Amazon and Apple Music) which were highlighted by Vonderau (2017) as the new dominating way of music distribution.

New channels for communication and the emerging international market

As the above indicate social media along with digitalization, not only empowers artists, as Wikstrom (2014) suggests, but also helps intermediaries to develop new networks as well as to proceed in collaborations. Most importantly, it adds an international dimension to national music industries. Subsequently, most of the interviewees mentioned that a new pool of international customers’ as well as colleagues emerges, while the web gives them the ability either to provide services or to cooperate with stakeholders internationally. Thus, for some interviewees digitalization instead of reducing their clients (Hesmondhalgh & Meier, 2015) offered them the opportunity to find international collaborations challenging the traditional understanding of local markets. For N.Pantazopoulos, a live music events promoter and coordinator, new digital channels such as the social media offer him the ability to interact easily with booking agents and tour managers in international level. Thus as he describes the process, now promoters like him have the chance to negotiate easily and organize events with artists from all over the world whereas through platforms like Facebook he has the opportunity to organize his associates efficiently in order to have quick results.

“Our whole communication is based on the Internet. The event coordinators communicate with each other via the internet. There would be nothing without the presence of the internet.”

Reflecting Waldfogel’s remark (2012) that digital music files increase the demand of live events, N. Pantazopoulos mentions that digitalization additionally creates a new channel for local artists to communicate with venue operators as well as promoters abroad in order to organize concerts overseas. For him these new frames in intermediate communication are not necessarily limited only to music, other professionals or artists can reach clients no matter their location:

“With a good agent, some would be able to reach Italy for example and ask for some extra money. And this is always based on the Internet. And of course, this is done in other places outside the music industry. There is a guy who makes us some artworks, he is 16 years old, started by posting artworks that he made on Instagram, and now has reached artists such as Future (American hip hop artist and performer). The internet was a channel for all this.”

For the same interviewee, this new state of international cooperation via the internet influences in some extent the domestic music consumption creating a new international music scene where audiences can attend gigs with international artists; a factor that influences their relationship with domestic acts. In other words, the ability that he has now to communicate

directly with tour managers despite their location or their language creates a new variety of international acts who perform live in Athens, creating a new international music market and attracting local audience from the short frames of domestic music. Moreover for him, there is a significant change as regards the network that is required for an intermediate to reach an international collaboration. As he mentions in the past artists needed the help of record companies in order to reach acclaimed promoters and event operators and sometimes the same relation had to work the other way around. Now he can contact from multiplatinum to independent artists as well as to book large venues without the help of record companies. Ultimately he detects that the new developments in communication lead live music operation to a significant increase. The above mentioned factors correlate with parts of literature which was presented in the theoretical framework. In particular, as Bennet mentioned (2015) the emergence of the online “sphere” created a space based on digital network elements such as blogs, forums and online groups where experiences from live music participation can be exchanged quickly, promoting simultaneously the events’ participation as well as the pushing audiences to affiliate with new music genres. In addition as Dewan and Ramaprasad suggest (2014) that, social media enhance the discovery of new music, a process that correlates also with the content from live events which can be found online., Although, most interviewees insisted these new international frames influence multiple types of music intermediation. Therefore it should be noted that intermediaries from other spaces such music radio. At this point, L. Antonopoulos, head director of Greek public music radio station “Kosmos Fm”, and co-founder of Greek station “Jazz FM” mentioned that digitalization offers music radio stations the chance to produce and promote content in a global scale so that it can reach listeners from several countries. In his opinion, locality is not a limit anymore as radio intermediaries and producers can now approach new markets as well as new local audiences either through web radios and digital media or with direct digital signal transmission:

“And now we are going through a particular phase and I do not know if this happens only with web radios or only with digital radios, but the locality can now be eliminated if you want to remove it. Right now on the Internet, the program of Kosmos FM has been heard in Russia, Guatemala or Canada. And these are particular examples not random. This has been done on the internet, in the same way I can hear at home a station from Jamaica or a station from N. Orleans or a station from anywhere. Digital radio gives you the ability to transmit to a range far greater than the one you had as a station”

Hence, as the literature indicates, digitalization offer to music media intermediates such as radio stations the ability to exploit technology and operate in a new space surpassing local frames through online features and a new mobility (Ala-Fossi, Lax, O'Neill, Jauert & Shaw, 2008). Nevertheless, the occupation of new markets as well as new professional networks for music intermediaries was mentioned also by the interviewees from the recording units. For P. Vinakos, the web provides him the opportunity to collaborate with entrepreneurs and producers from all over the world just by contacting them on Facebook or Linked In:

“Before, I could not do many things. Let’s say recently I went and recorded with a well-known producer from Canada in Spain. I would not do this before because all this was done with a message. We had a chat online, we were talking and he said I’m coming to Europe, would you like to join me? I told him I’m coming. Now try to picture the same procedure without the internet, it is impossible”

Give that Moon, Barnett and Lin consider (2010) technological development a major factor of international music flow, we could assume that the new e-streams that intermediaries use to communicate can question the status quo in global music industry. Hence, the new international collaborations that intermediaries achieve, not only bring about an inter-cultural development but also a greater profit margin. As the interviewee mentions, now his services are global while clients and stakeholders can send digital content overseas in a matter of second. Moreover he gave examples of local bands that had professional collaborations with American executive producers or studios contacting them online and completing money transaction with platforms such as PayPal while for him it would be impossible for intermediaries to cooperate with artists in different locations 20 years ago. Subsequently the digitalization of music file apart from the terms of consumption changes the process of professional edit:

“I can work with a man in America or Asia or anywhere online without having to spend money to go there. And I have more opportunities. I met that Canadian, and since then he sends me several elements to edit, drums, vocals or other instruments. Before (digitalization) what would he do? He would send them to some locals because they would know him as they are in the same area. Me too, I would work with the locals only otherwise I would had to relocate my business”

Furthermore, for A. Konstantaras, the web offers a new customers’ space beyond the frames of locality also for music labels in terms of delivery and distribution. As he mentions there are collectors in Japan who are keen on collecting rare vinyl or cassette records from all over the world. Another process that would not be possible in the pre-digital era, as the transaction along with the promotion of the products takes place online. In addition he mentions that he can directly communicate as well as to collaborate with less acclaimed artists in several locations around the world, whereas artists can also reach labels abroad:

“I know someone who spoke to some people that I did not think they would ever answer you. From social media he found them and just ask them what kind of equipment they use. Or you can send to a label in Sweden which can really watch you afterwards.”

Moreover, for V. Ananidis, a music website founder and music journalist, google engines create a pool of articles and content, a factor that helps minor music acts to validate their presence towards international promoters. As he mentions, international promoters can now confirm the reputation of foreign musicians before booking them just by searching online archives and mentions. In this way, digitalization offers a bidirectional profit for both sides, as it makes easier for smaller artists to perform abroad:

“Essentially the intermediary with whom the artist speaks abroad cannot have a picture of how much audience you gather in your country. So the only thing that can actually be seen is if there are many writings around you, it's like recommendations, like online references”

As T. Zervakis explains, during the past decades several American labels had also the opportunity to increase their talent pool by inviting artists to send them their work online. Thus, record labels could now either to scout or to expand their catalogs with international artists and producers no matter where they are located. Eventually, for M. Manoliadis, a music producer and a label representative which is specialized in Hip-hop music, the new

terms of communication play a major role in his label consistency. For him, the label would not be in a position to expand without the direct communication that the web offers:

“I believe that the way we work has changed, for example, I worked with an artist from Larissa without having even met him, we met after the collaboration. At first, I knew him only through the internet. (...)The music might be the same (without the web), but the composition of the label would be different; all the artists would be from the same city, only from Thessaloniki or from Athens, for example. The label wouldn't be nationwide with artists from all around Greece”

Ultimately, the new terms of professional communication seem to lead towards a less locally clustered market where intermediaries can surpass barriers of transaction and shipping. Thus this reflects Benjamins and Wigands opinion (as cited in Bockstedt, Kauffman & Riggins, 2006) regarding the new opportunities that the web brings in online transactions. Hence for them, e-links between suppliers, producers and of course consumers cause a decline in coordination costs; a major factor that may offer several business opportunities for new players to emerge.

Visualization of music, a new pool of clients

According to Holt (2011), one of the basic pillars of the music industry was the music video. Hence as music video, he defines the visualization of a song that in the pre-digital era was feasible with the help of a record company while it was televised through music television broadcasters such as MTV (Holt, 2011). Eventually the rise of YouTube as a dominant social media and entertainment platform offered a new space for visualized music content transforming the ways of music promotion and consumption. Thus as many interviewees mentioned, online music videos changed their progression towards two significant directions. On one hand YouTube increased significantly the demand for visualized music and on the other it accelerated music consumption; a factor that motivated many listeners to become active producers and performers. For C. Nebotakis, a video director specialized in music clips and founder of a video production company, the majority of music consumption is now based on videos, a factor that changes the whole spectrum of music intermediation as it creates new motives and changes the role of several stakeholders:

“A nice record can make success but once it's successful we'll tell him (the artist) come on to shoot a video. Also many different formats came out, there are no longer just the video clips there are the lyrics videos for example. Listeners can learn verses and not only with one standard font and four quartets. They turn more visible with advanced graphics”

As he continues, artists who tend to visualize their records have higher consumption rates whereas the same artists' records seem to have lower number of views uploaded just as audio files on YouTube. That echoes Holt's remark (2011) that the production of music video becomes a transforming field of cultural production separated from traditional gatekeepers such as music television or labels. Furthermore, interviewees such as A. Konstantaras, believe that digital video and online platforms transform the forms of music distribution as visualized records are spread significantly faster while they gain increased popularity:

“You do not care to produce a CD. And abroad videos mean a lot as a service. Tyler the creator for example would not be what he is without his clips. People are watching more than listening to music. Especially younger audiences. Look at the Greek audience, you see a song

that will not make a clip and then you see one which makes a video, the difference between these two will be enormous, it will be a huge difference”

Additionally for N. Pantazopoulos, the YouTube affiliation plays a major role as regards the prospective success of an artist a factor that subsequently helps music video directors, producing companies and video platforms to become sought after for the music industry:

“Even people who did not deserve the reputation they have at the moment manage to get record sales. Just because they simply challenge audiences with their videos”

In addition, as he mentions, the web made videos and images exchange such an easy procedure where now live music operators can increase their reputation just by visualizing their events experience on social media, a change which according to him influences the frames of competition in the field. Furthermore, as most of the interviewees were quite elaborative regarding music’s new visual prospects, V. Ananidis agreed that through the changes in bands’ affiliation with photos and videos, music consumption has been turned into a new concrete space:

“Now the music is not something cut off from the rest, that is, the whole aesthetic which is the visual or the chosen words in upload’s description, how you will impress it how you will build it all in the end, I like it this is because it does not make one-sided art. I mean the video clip, photography these aspects give a positive package which is very interesting”

Nevertheless, according to many interviewees the aforementioned transformations not only changed the demand for video intermediation but also motivated numerous listeners to become aspiring artists while their daily contact with music videos on YouTube or other platforms along with the reduced production costs create a new pool for potential clients. For P. Vinakos, many clients are motivated by YouTube as they try to seek after a successful music career. Moreover, in his opinion YouTube makes the distance from aspirations to stardom to seem eliminated as many new amateur independent clients visit his facility to record and afterwards they independently shoot videos demonstrating luxuries and trying to imitate acclaimed hip-hop or other genres artists:

“In the past you would see Mick Jagger at Rolling Stone magazine, it was impossible for you to be featured there. Now your idol is not Mick Jagger, it's Lil Pump and it's very easy to get where Lil Pump has been showed, visually, just spend all your money in a video clip. “

For T. Zervakis, this phenomenon of teens who try to follow the example of their favorite music artists on YouTube, leads his business revenue in historically high levels. In correlation with Oliver (2010) who sees the “do it yourself” model as a dominating tendency in music business, T. Zervakis mentions that the increasing rates of online music media as well as the lack of obstacles in procedures such as distribution, made his business to blow up as numbers of clients visiting his studio in a daily basis while they believe that a decent recording is enough to rise in their respective music scene and similarly on YouTube. Yet this transformation does not guarantee artists' future success:

“The business has been skyrocketed; it is not just on the rise. I think there is no filtering anymore. This is good for us professionally and for the industry. Aesthetically and from the point of view of artists and what will be achieved after that, is foggy.”

Additionally, for C. Nebotakis the increasing popularity of YouTube along with music videos created new opportunities for the visualized records as well as the music video intermediaries and accordingly he detects a similar increase in his number of clients. As he says, his clients consider music videos on YouTube a successful strategy that offers validity to records increasing artists' popularity, a procedure that is absolutely fueled by the industry's transformation:

“They are forced to follow! They watch in social media their idols or bigger artists in the field and they say “look at them, they shouted five videos!”. All the smaller bands and each smaller artist is forced to make a video because he follows the strategies of the acclaimed ones”

The above discussed sub-themes indicate a first group of transformations as well as some changing dynamics in the sphere of music intermediation. At first, interviewees believe that record labels pass to a new phase where their role has been changing. Similarly, for them, the future of record companies in on advertisement as well as digital networks. In addition, as it was mentioned above, the web tends to transform not only the traditional ways of distribution but also the practices of professional and corporate communication. Hence, it should be highlighted the importance of the increasing international transactions which take place among intermediaries. That means that some of the local barriers have been removed as music professionals can now interact and collaborate with each other despite their location. Eventually, another conclusion which could be extracted from these first sub-themes is the transformation of music consumption. Subsequently, the increasing demand for intermediaries that could take over a process of visualization, has been increased. as music becomes more visualized through popular platforms, such as YouTube and other similar social media services.

4.2 Digital Adaptability

New terms of advertisement

Another crucial aspect regarding the directions that music intermediation can take, was found as four interviewees spoke about the new prospects of digital advertisement; the first sub-theme regarding the importance of digital adaptability in music intermediation. As literature indicated the web becomes a major promotional channel for music content (Preston & Rogers, 2011). Although, given intermediaries focused not only on the artistic promotion that the web brings, but also in the opportunity to advertise themselves and their services. In particular, some referred to digital media as a new way to monetize their services while online content helps them either to reach new customers directly or to add new features such as targeted marketing. In particular, L. Antonopoulos mentions that the web offers music radio an extra revenue which can be used either to advertise the station itself or it can be combined with the traditional radio commercials. Hence, it gives advertisers to the ability to target younger audiences as music radio tends to occupy digital fields such as social media:

“That is, it is an additional channel for both advertising and revenue growth (...) In essence; the radio no longer has only the airtime, to commercially sell to the advertiser, now the social media are also associated with it, and its website. It has multiplied,-just like all other media- the ways in which it can generate revenue and promote its product. He has other means in his disposal to sell to advertisers and thus to earn revenue from there. Just do not imagine these

are huge figures, do not imagine that triples or doubles the revenue, it is simply an extra help that can also assist in the targeting that many advertisers want to have”

Moreover for C. Nebotakis, digitalization offers to professionals like himself the option to advertise his service easier through display networks and social media, a process that in the past was strictly a privilege of record companies:

“First of all, advertising is easier for you now to be found. In the past, clients could only see your work on a music channel at the end of every clip at the credits; he had only three seconds to write your name or the name of the company. This is not the case anymore on YouTube. Otherwise, they used to find you through record labels or through managers (...).

Thus, C. Nebotaki’s point reflects what Salo, Lankinen and Mäntymäki defined (2013) as direct communication (within the social media sphere) between different key players of the music industry and consumers. As he continues, the transformation of music television into YouTube, gave the opportunity to both video producing companies and record labels to advertise products through music videos. Thus product placement has been a popular advertising practice in new music videos whereas in many cases traditional television had barriers that stopped third parties to advertise by promoting products in music videos. Nevertheless, he mentions that digital advertising offers such a spectrum of opportunities helping music video producers to become independent from the record companies, their traditional clients. Yet he indicates that there are many cases where even signed artists are obliged to seek after advertisers in order to fund their videos through product placement:

“The artist pays for it in most cases. This is why they are forced to put in products. You can easily notice that during the last two years. There is product placement in every music video, sometimes it is “over-branding” though. You watch a music video clip for 3 minutes and you see the product 15 times.”

For P. Vinakos, digitalization also changes massively the way that he communicates his services while he mentions that now there are no barriers in the way that he can reach his clients. Subsequently, as he continues, in the past the only way for a recording unit to be advertised was throughout the artists’ interviews or cd booklets. Contrary to that now most of his clients give him credit on the “description” field under YouTube videos and some even put his logo. Moreover he can also reach potential clients himself just by sending them emails or contacting them on social media:

“In the past, in order to trust an associate, you would see his name on some CDs. Oct(...) If you were not signed to a record label to send you somewhere in particular. While with YouTube, many artists write credits “recorded and mixed by him”. Now you can also send your own advertisements to others, to say you have done these jobs or “It would be nice to work with you”. You can advertise yourself in a much more direct way. (...) That's it. Even big names in the field work like that”

Additionally to that, T. Zervakis believes that as long as he can spread his work through platforms such as iTunes, Spotify and YouTube, he reaches a successful form of advertisement as in many cases clients tend to learn about him through such channels and accordingly asking him for technical consultancy. For N. Pantazopoulos, the present as well as the future of live music operators is based on online advertisement whereas social media manage to enhance his activity. As he estimates, online advertisement and promotion

increased significantly the number of music events in Athens within the last years contrary to the severe financial crisis that the city had to face. Moreover, online advertisement played a critical role as regards business to business communication. As he mentions, online engagement with users led traditional media to follow suit promoting him and his affiliates; a fact that in his opinion changes significantly the advertising monopoly that traditional media used to have as regards the music business. Subsequently, multinational brands saw his work and decided to reach him offering sponsorships and funding:

“This monopoly has been changed, and there is also attention by other channels. (...) There are more sponsorships now. We had a sponsorship when we brought IAMDDDB (British artist) it was sponsored by Adidas, it was very important that a company with international visibility cooperates with us but what is more important is that the companies themselves search for collaborations”

As he continues, digital literacy and deep knowledge of online advertisement gives him an advantage towards older aged competitors who fail to promote their work online and subsequently to reach audiences. Subsequently, the abovementioned factors refer to Hrac (2012) who mentioned examples of traditional music intermediaries who through a deep understanding of digital channels manage to gain a form of independence from the industry's major companies, building considerable customer relationships. Moreover, it seems that new technologically advanced intermediaries such as the social media help traditional intermediaries to increase their value as well as their power in the music field by providing state of art channels and highly sophisticated advertisement, a process that could be defined as a state of re-intermediation (Jones, 2000).

Self-education

Another crucial part for some interviewees was that web offers the opportunity to users to obtain critical skills helping them to develop of a form of certain expertise and hence to easily operate as intermediaries themselves offering their consultancy to artists. For them, digital information and particularly YouTube or other video platforms provide unlimited free lessons, tutorials, and guidance for users who are keen on self-education, lack of funds or are not in the position to pay tuition fees in technical schools or universities. Thus, as Selwyn, Gorard and Furlong mention (2006) online activity changes the terms of adult education providing the ability to pursue accessibility in new fields. Subsequently, this sub-theme suggests that many intermediaries manage to remain vital or even to evolve their position within the industry by self-educating themselves using the web. For C. Nebotakis, his career as music video producer began as he had to produce a video for himself due to a lack of budget. As he mentions, it would be impossible to gain such a technical knowledge without the web:

“Without YouTube, I should have worked as a waiter for, let's say, many years to learn. I would have to go to school if I could not find out on the internet. Or someone should have shown me. I cannot say I will pick up one thousand euros to get a small camera and learn for myself. Who would do that?”

Moreover, for P. Vinakos, the form of self-education that the web provides has two aspects. On one hand, it accelerates the educational procedure for new intermediaries as in the past they could not obtain such skills without professional and interactive coordination. On the

other, it influences negatively music intermediation as well as cultural production. For him, amateurs tend to watch videos online with instructions regarding technical knowledge on sound engineering, a process that cannot compare with professional or academic education. Accordingly, as he says many intermediaries who obtain only web-learning knowledge, lack of critical thinking as well as relevant experience. On the other hand, C. Vekris, a sound engineer and consultant for music matters of an education institute in Athens, mentions that even in his case, he tends to use information that he finds online in order to evolve his work:

“Now you can learn everything, we use the knowledge from the internet in our work to be honest. Some of my own sources were found free of charge on the internet, so obviously the internet helped us to see what kind of tools we need to execute in the music industry. Some of these things are necessary to be learned in order to work, so the web becomes an open source library for us where everyone could type and see whatever he wants”

According to the above, it can be concluded that a key aspect of music intermediation is the ways that music intermediaries can exploit digitalization. Based on above sub-themes, digitalization not only offers new benefits to users and listeners but also provides a number of advantages to intermediaries. Thus, such gatekeepers can strengthen their position in the industry by obtaining easier forms of knowledge that were not easily approachable before digitalization. Additionally, their enhancement does not come only educationally but also financially. In other words, through the new forms of direct advertisement they manage to multiply their profit by the new promotional streams that the web offers as they reach their clients directly without the need of traditional media gatekeepers such as the press or television. Ultimately, in this way they can now the monopoly of traditional media as regards the promotion of both artists and intermediate services has been challenged.

4.3 Current Necessities

Professionalism and industry standards

Proceeding towards the core of the research question, it was vital to investigate the reasons that make intermediaries still a vital part of the industry. Thus, several subthemes were surfaced as the interviewees were asked to define the factors that push artists to ask for professional help. Hence, professionalism was one of the major sub-themes that were highlighted among the conversations. More specifically, 6 interviewees were quite elaborative as regards professionalism while they put it as a major element which separates artists with a professional potential and amateurs. Thus, for these interviewees, despite the advantages of the Web, artists remain unable to handle the multiple aspects which are required for a music career. For P. Vinakos, artists who are not keen on recording with professionals indicate that they are not confident enough to pursue a proficient career:

“If someone decides to record in his room shows that there is something wrong with it. It means that he does not believe much in himself. Because if he believed he would put all of his money in a professional studio in order to achieve a good result, which would prove that he (the artist) really believes in his material”

As the same interviewee continues, is vital for both intermediaries and aspiring artists to understand that specialty is a key aspect towards a professional result, a crucial point that reflects Galluszka's opinion (2015) that the majority of artists do not have the expertise to handle several processes of the music business chain:

“If you do not take the music seriously, you cannot have any further plans. It is like if I would say, when I made this studio, that I'll put the plasterboard on my own. (...) If you don't have a solid professional base how far will you go? Your project may roll for a while, but then what will happen. The same stands for every field, can we all be doctors or lawyers?”

On the other hand, as A. Konstantaras mentions, aspiring bands and artists lack of media promotion failing to reach broad audiences. For him that another impact of the lack of professionalism that many independent musicians have to confront. For the same interviewee, public relations and stakeholders management is a highly sophisticated procedure that cannot be replaced just by daily internet use:

“I mean there is audience that could listen to these bands but for some reason these bands don't reach that audience. The reason is that there is no professional approach to the promotion of these bands in Greece. That's all. They just hope that they will be discovered by media such as Vice or Athens Voice (Greek newspaper), there is no professional promo to help them to blow up. There is no professional prospect to put them on the radios to play and I think Facebook and internet has obviously a limit”

Furthermore, as T. Zervakis remarks, through their experience, him and his colleagues have notice that after virtually two years, most of his independent clients quit in case they do not see financial results and appreciation from the audience. Nonetheless, as the same interview notes, the clients that tend to quit from the pursue of stardom, after 2 or 3 years of amateur efforts they return to ask again for his technical support as well as his expertise. For him, this phenomenon indicates that after a comparison between professional production with the help of intermediation and amateur activity, artists tend to choose professionalism, returning to his service:

“There is a time when they are coming back again. That's because they feel that their failure was just a bad moment, they feel that the lack of professional support in their sound is responsible for their failure”

Additionally, asking the same interviewee about his views on disintermediation, he mentioned that such a procedure tends to fail as artists that might be talented but with no access to intermediation, seem to fail as regards a crucial aspect of music business; the industry standards. Thus, for him talent itself is not enough for a professional career if the artist can't meet some particular requirements as regards his or her sound, performance and promotion:

“The point is that when their work does not meet industry standards, it cannot go ahead. It is not enough to make music, unfortunately or fortunately, it's like talking about a product completely invalid, as if we are talking about a chocolate, it is not enough for a chocolate to be fine it has to be in accordance with the state's guidelines, with health or other type of standards in this case”

Subsequently, another interviewee, V. Ananidis agrees that there is a significant difference between major artists who are surrounded by intermediaries and independent aspiring musicians. For him this sort of intermediation leads to professionalism and subsequently to a critical advantage towards smaller artists. That could be related with the opinion of Graham, Burnes, Lewis and Langer (2004) who remark that intermediaries have the expertise to provide high-level records in combination with professional manufacturing and marketing.

Similarly, for V. Ananidis, professional executives can guarantee that the music has been produced and delivered according to the industry standards.

“Many things work outside of industry, like garage-studios, basements, etc, The level is not as good as the records you see in the charts. (...) There is an alteration there, which is not seen in major names, respectively. What does this mean? The big names in order to become successful they focused on the basic product, which is the music itself. The met particular standards”

Furthermore, for C. Vekris, the need of intermediation in contemporary music industry can be correlated with another core question: how far does an artist want to go? For him, every aspiring artist has to ask himself if he wants a professional result and subsequently if he wants to separate himself from amateur-level music production. Similarly, for him intermediaries in every aspect of music production, promotion and distribution, are the ones who can offer a professional result:

“If what you do is important then you can wait or ask for the support of some people. The internet favors this process very much. So surely, what you want to do with music, you have to make it clear. If you want to become a professional, bear in mind that professionalism means devotion. (...)So if you want to set your image as a musician and as an artist you have to do it right, and most probably you cannot do it right at home, you need to go to a studio or somewhere else”

Similarly, for L. Antonopoulos, obstacles such as competition in combination with the role of professional executives, give a big advantage to traditional media intermediaries and thus the minor amateur players cannot compete against the music radio. Subsequently, music radio intermediaries using their research and analysis skills they manage to obtain the majority of market's revenue:

“You have to look at it a little more, let's say through a microscope, to find out what could ever been threatened. (...)Who has the ability to have more people and be able to provide them with the tools to do the right research and to make a complete broadcast on the radio receiving revenue from advertising?(...) You cannot compete unless there is an FM Radio that plays always the same playlist and operates with only three employees”

Ultimately, all the above, echo Hrac's indications (2013) that even in independent music fields there is always a need of expert individuals who can provide state of the art analysis and in depth understanding of music markets and their given industrial standards.

Specialization, differentiation and funding

Going further with the interviews and discussing about the elements that help intermediaries to remain relevant, 8 interviewees were quite elaborative as regards the combination of specialization, experience and access to equipment and funds. Thus, for them, despite the digital tools that every personal computer offers, there are still futures such as the understanding of each music genre as well as the ability to operate with state of art technology. Subsequently for C. Vekris, the lack of funds that intermediaries require in order to provide services is often a double-edged sword for both artists and gatekeepers. On one hand aspiring musicians might not have the necessary income to pay such services on the

other intermediaries provide access to highly sophisticated facilities and tools whereas intermediation guarantees experience and additional knowledge on given fields:

“At first he (the artist) cannot have the required experience, so for a person who is still an amateur; the only reason for not going to an intermediary is the financial one. At second, you get what you paid for, so there are studios with 10 euros per hour and studios with 40 euros per hour. Some things, however, you can't have them at home. With € 4,000 you can't have anything but an average sound, so you must rent the equipment if you are actually ambitious”

For C. Nebotakis, even though YouTube gave a different perspective to home videos while musicians could now record themselves performing, professional video equipment as well as other features of popular music videos such as lights or actors require fund that an aspiring musician is not in position to have in order to self-produce his or her clip. For him technical features and access to state of art equipment is a crucial factor that in many cases is more important than the artists' taste or the producers' aesthetics:

“The money goes first. And then they look at the aesthetics.(...) Now you can buy a dslr camera with very little money and to produce something, you download a free program. But you cannot have all the technical features, such as lighting”

As the same interviewee continues the production of music videos differs than other types of users-generated content on YouTube, as musicians are not able to visualize their music just with a home camera, hence for him, differences between other types of visual entertainment such as vlogs or tutorials and music videos are significant:

“You need funds, you need equipment, like an electrician wants his suitcase with the tools, so you want your suitcase with your lens, a video camera, the devices you need to work with, you cannot shoot video with your hands, you need some specific things. So you need a camera, you need lenses, even the batteries are expensive. Money wise it is an expensive “sport” to have it as a hobby. (...) It has become a trend to shoot amateur videos among YouTube but that totally a different scene”

Moreover, for N. Pantazopoulos, the intermediary is a gatekeeper who ensures the communication between listeners or artists and investors. Thus for him, his position allows him at first to raise awareness regarding certain music shows and at second to convince major companies to enhance financially concerts or music events. As he believes, that is a critical financial transaction which cannot be achieved directly between venues and marketers:

“There are teams which manage to raise even bigger budgets during the last years; there are business executives who will support us because they see that eventually the organization of the events pays back. Eventually the Greek audience tends to support more and more events as well as the tickets' market increases”

Thus, as it was mentioned in the theoretical framework, Brousseau remarks (2006), that despite the decline in record sales' the demand for music events presented an increase during the past decade in leading music markets such as US and France. Nonetheless, focusing more on the issue of funding , P. Vinakos mentions that even if artists invest considerable funds in their own home equipment there are two potential outcomes: at first there are certain genres which require large facilities in order to be recorded and at second their sound will remain average whereas for him funds investment through intermediation equals higher sound standards:

“However, if you have a good sound system and a good pc you might be able to mix yourself, that's possible. There is another aspect however, you can't record genres like trance, for example, into your room you need a big professional studio, and your room's acoustic will be noticed in your sound. Too many try to do everything at home in order to save money. I understand that. But it is all about investment, if you don't put money in your sound you won't get an outcome”

Furthermore, M. Manoliadis mentions that the use of social media becomes more and more complicated for independent artists, a factor that change the financial needs of online promotion:

“In fact, if you do pay for advertising, your music will never appear on users' Facebook newsfeed; it actually forces you to pay in order to reach the audience you want. That's negative from a perspective for someone who is an indie artist and does not have a record company behind him to pay for everything, so it is an additional expense. There are already so many expenses like mixing mastering, video clips and so much.”

Nonetheless, for the same interviewees, financial investment it is closely related with specialization and in depth knowledge of the particularities that each music scene has. Moreover, for them that is a key feature as several intermediaries are in position to promote artist through the pluralism of information that the web offers. In other words, for them the constant offer of online music creates a totality of chaotic information whereas it enhances different music sub-cultures with their own needs, ethics and tactics. In particular, as C. Nebotakis indicates, each music genre requires particular aesthetics as regards its visualization and hence art directors who are specialized in music videos are obliged to be familiar with each genre's taste:

“The aesthetics of the video clip plays a critical role in what music you want to promote. For instance a hip hop band, can't go to a filmmaker who is specialized in soap operas, he won't be able to make the desired result, it will make it with the aesthetics of soap opera . So he does not know how to handle the genre properly.”

Hence, as Haynes remarks (2005), intermediaries remain crucial due to their cultural literacy as they can understand the differences of taste and authenticity in several genres and communities. As C. Nebotakis says, the specialty in every music genre is also related with the proper knowledge of equipment. Subsequently intermediaries in music video production remain relevant as they are able to tell and handle different technological and aesthetical features for each genre:

“There are particular video producers who know how to handle the visuals for certain type of music as some others could edit the picture for some rock bands etc. As a specialist, the intermediary here is someone who for example makes only mainstream music videos, the same professional usually can't make more industrial music with tougher pictures; also the equipment he uses plays a role”

For A. Villiotis, there are thousands or records online, that creates a chaotic environment where is highly unlike of an aspiring artist to stand out without the help of a record company. Thus, in this case record executives have the expertise to help an artist to differentiate his music from the whole of online content:

“It is extremely impossible and difficult for someone to be found no matter how good his song is. Every week 25,000 songs are uploaded to Spotify, I do not remember exactly the number but it's huge, how many chances have these songs to stand out? Audiences tend to go to content that stands out”

That could be correlated with by Jean-Samuel and Thomas's remark (2009) that the pluralism of users in platforms such as Myspace pushes audiences to cluster around artists who have been promoted by major labels. As A. Villiotis continues, minor artists initially try to differentiate with the tools that digitalization offers until they manage to collaborate with a record company while records intermediaries are the ones who have the knowledge to evolve each musician's career. In addition to that, L. Antonopoulos mentions that music radio producers still have the ability to inform listeners regarding songs that deserve to differentiate creating simultaneously a unique experience. Contrary to Morris who sees (2015) suggestion algorithms in streaming as a new form of cultural curation, L. Antonopoulos considers radio producers as an irreplaceable aspect of music curation. Subsequently that is a process which for him is similar to education whereas music playlists or suggestion algorithms are unable to provide the expertise and the cultural knowledge that a radio producer has:

“The producer may go from present to the past and make a comparison throughout three songs. That stimulates listeners. This procedure helps listeners to broaden their perception of what they hear and through what they hear, how two songs of different eras can be linked. (...)It is an experience that also has to do with art and education. Radio is a cultural good. It participates in culture, a playlist does not participate in culture, radio participates in culture by suggesting, informing, commenting, combining.”

Furthermore, A. Konstantaras mentioned that that form of cultural knowledge along with the differentiations that each scene has, gives a critical advantage to intermediaries to keep their expertise relevant as they adapt in different audiences. Subsequently, intermediaries who operate in mainstream scenes are more familiar with major promotional techniques whereas intermediaries in alternative scenes are keen on DIY ethics:

“There are some specific types of music that will still run with the old model. No independent pop star will come out easily. (...)The mainstream audience is very difficult to be approached globally if you do not have a label running at such a level, if you do not have a label like EMI. Although, a punk rock band in America, will go for example to Fat Records, which belongs to Fat Mike of NOFX (American Punk/Rock band) or it will go to Epitah Records. Those are indie labels that are made by other artists and they have a family-type work ethics. (...)They also have DIY ethics. You speak the same language. You have the same ideology and it's easier to do your job. I think this plays a very important role.”

In conclusion, the above mentioned sub-themes regarding the elements of necessity seem to indicate that several aspects of music intermediation such as access to professional environments and efficient promotion. Moreover these findings signify the two aspects of digital “democratization” in creative industries. On one hand aspiring musicians do not need industrial support to distribute or to promote their work; on the other the rising popularity of web along with social networks and digital platforms produces massive clusters of content. Hence, at first only the content which meets particular industry standards manages to differentiate from the pool of online talent and subsequently to make a commercial success. Nonetheless this process requires in depth knowledge of the different audiences as well as

several forms of technical or cultural expertise which so far cannot be replaced by artificial intelligence or any other forms of digitalization.

4.3 Web utopianism and access to stardom

Online delusions

Discussing more with the interviewees about the possibilities of someone skipping the role of music intermediation in order to self-manage his or her career, 6 interviewees spoke about an increasing broad belief among aspiring artists regarding the advantages of the web. Hence for these intermediaries there is a whole generation of artists who believe that self-promotion can ensure access to stardom as well as a rising career. Subsequently for these interviewees, the terms of direct communication (which were also analyzed above) also create an illusion of “easy stardom” without any given validity that an intermediary could provide. For P. Vinakos, many aspiring artists tend to understand YouTube success as an equivalent to a successful career. Thus, they tend to invest as much as possible to their YouTube presence than actually evolving professional tactics and work ethics:

“It is simple to get a lot of views. Although, their motivation is what they will show, not what they will get from that, like money, for example, it may be easy for some amateurs to have the same amount of views like Lil Pump (American hip-hop artist and performer), it's a simple and direct process, yet it's not that easy to make the same revenue he makes, that's what they don't understand, sometimes it's funny”

Subsequently, as V. Ananidis mentions, the access to social media pushes bands to believe that by self-uploading their material or by posting their own photoshoots or visuals they can reach stardom without any external validity or promotion:

“The band itself will take a picture and upload it on its website or any other social media that it has. (...) this often creates a false sense of publicity. As you see there are bands which fuel this sense of publicity themselves without the feedback of external factors. They can buy likes and views, they can say let's make a photoshoot, or a very good video clip. This creates a sense of being a “star” without being actually valid, because it is not documented by any external factor. Obviously that does not bring any profit; sometimes you even lose money in this way”

Echoing Hrac's point (2013) that the music industry remains a multifunctional and complex field for artists, T. Zervakis, believes that the main factor which causes such delusion is the decrease of production costs. Thus, by easy accessibility to spaces such as music venues and recording facilities, aspiring artists believe that they are close to commercial success whereas for the same interviewee the final result is usually not the desired stardom:

“This is a fact at least from what I have experienced and from what I see happening today in the industry. Unfortunately, there is an illusion of convenience, as the economics have changed downward, the technological features went up and now there is accessibility to places where no independent artist would have access in the past. There are those now, who think that if they visit our facility or any other studio, they will accordingly produce the same product like their favorite commercial artist.”

For A. Konstantaras, the internet gives a sense of freedom while artists believe that success depends exclusively on the effort they put on digital networks. In other words, it seems that the amount of time an artist spends online in order to promote his or her work as well as the social media engagement consist an easy step to stardom. Nonetheless, A. Konstantaras argues that in fact there are required particular skills in order to have an efficient online presence and thus artists or labels usually ask from external companies to provide their services as regards digital promotion and social media management:

“Internet creates a feeling that if you spent your whole time over a laptop you can be everything. You could not think like this before. Many musicians say “who cares” we have the internet, we don’t need no one. But to be really efficient on the internet you need to work from 9 to 5 every day. You must stay every day over your emails. Usually many artists work with expert teams which do marketing for bands; they do all the work on the internet. They are independent management teams which get paid in order to manage your online presence”

Eventually, A. Villiotis argues that there are examples of acclaimed artists such as the Radiohead who became independent after they reach stardom through the help of record label. Hence, that fueled the discussion about disintermediation as many ambitious musicians thought that they could follow suit. Nevertheless, for him that’s not a realistic scenario for newcomers in the industry:

“The case where the whole thing started with the internet is Radiohead who made their name through a multinational record company which spent millions to make their reputation and then they decided to work independently. I’ve spent millions for you and then you say I’ll go on my own. Radiohead first made their name through the company, and then they said we will do it ourselves, they are the first who followed this model. That does not mean that if you make a band tomorrow you will be the same like Radiohead, no one knows you.”

Network, reputation and validity

Another sub-theme that indicates the current role of intermediation in music industry contrary to any prospective disintermediation is the importance of networks. In particular, four interviewees mentioned defined their services as a gain for artists in terms of networking, reputation and validity. For them, intermediation remains the gate towards listeners ‘engagement, appreciation and artistic acclaim. Hence, as A. Villiotis mentions, it takes years for experience to build a sufficient network that can provide opportunities and chances. Thus, despite the talent that an artist can demonstrate, a record executive remains in position to offer him access to certain advanced professionals and other intermediaries as well as promotional channels such as festivals:

“No matter how strong is an artist, no matter how talented he is, it is impossible to have the network that accompany has. So the company is based on some elements that are still necessary. I have been several years in the discography I have a specific network. This network, is more important than someone’s instinct and even if he has a deep knowledge of music the network it is still not simply given, it requires years of experience”

Accordingly, A. Villiotis’s view reflects Clemons, Gu and Lang’s remark (2002) as for them the most vital form of intermediation is the reputation management as well as the accessibility offer. Moreover for A. Villiotis, there are several other types of particular intermediaries such

as record publishers that cannot be reached individually. Accordingly, an intermediary with a large network can connect aspiring artists with such professionals. For Mr. Villiotis this is a process that cannot be achieved by an individual who tries to reach major gatekeepers through online communication without the help of record executives:

“It is a type of culture, which when is given to a newcomer in discography; he becomes a part of a whole. (...) Otherwise it's like you're sitting alone with your laptop and trying to convince a publisher in England to hear you. So another big player opens the door and says I have one or two-three-four-five names you have to listen to”

For M. Manoliadis, besides access to numerous professionals, a label also offer a standard number of audience, a process that is digitalized as now label's engagement is not only achieved through traditional media but it is the result of online activity. In particular, for him a large number of listeners can be described as YouTube subscribers or social media followers whereas it requires years of digital presence to reach the number of the online engagement that a successful label offers:

“Our YouTube channel has reached enough subscribers because we have acclaimed and known artists, and other musicians who made massive success. So we have a lot of subscribers and remarkable artists as well. (...)So with our subscribers, you'll get the views that an individual newcomer can't make if he'll start a (YouTube) channel from scratch. The same applies to our Facebook page.”

For N. Pantazopoulos, network remains a crucial aspect of intermediary services also in music events' operators. As he argues in such cases, an intermediary is not only an individual but a brand himself. Thus, it provides to both, artists and venue owners, reputation and recognition among the industry, a factor that cannot be obtained in short term:

“The promoter and the company have their own brand. In this case I have my own brand name, which works with any venue, that can't be changed. My reputation is already built. So this is the expectation of the others from you as a promoter, your connections and your stakeholders, your network. That's what I offer, you have your own people, whether globally, or in Athens, you have your own audience, you control your public relations.”

Ultimately, for V. Ananidis, music journalism offers reputation management along with validity to both acclaimed and aspiring artists. As he remarks, artists expect online media or press not to offer both recognition and validity. Nevertheless, he believes that for minor types of digital media such as music blogs, the same process has been reversed. Hence, minor players in online music journalism, need major bands and artists to be featured in their platforms and subsequently to transform their listeners into visits:

“Right now, it (music journalism) provides just pure prestige, which prestige comes in quantity and not in quality unless we are talking about very large printed magazines or newspapers. But nowadays in Greece, even if “Lifo” (Well-known Greek newspaper) writes for you, it does not matter what it says, what matters is the importance of your mention and how often it is repeated .We offer legitimacy, that's it. (...)If there is a buzz at the moment for a band we will increase their legitimacy towards listeners”

Therefore it can be said that the above, echo Maguire and Matthews's view (2012) that intermediaries add value to the industry by offering legitimacy as well as validity to the

cultural production Eventually, as the last two sub-themes show, despite the arguments in favor of disintermediation, interviewees indicate that limited examples as well as the direct creation and distribution of content create multiple fallacies regarding disintermediation. Thus, it seems that re-intermediation is not only the appearance of new gatekeepers such as technological companies but the re-establishment of the belief that the music industry is a multifunctional field where many different aspects have to co-operate in order to provide a final result. Moreover, despite the digital channels that every individual has, reputation remains a vital characteristic for records and artists. Subsequently music audiences expect gatekeepers not to deliver the content but to provide valid distinction between music that deserves to be heard (based on taste variations, sub-cultures and different music scenes) and music that does not. Accordingly that could be correlated with Negus definition of cultural intermediaries (2002) as executives who are in position to connect consumers/listeners with the cultural market and eventually with the artists.

5. Conclusions/Discussion

After the completion of the research process, the project was in a position to present useful insights regarding the current tendencies in the music business. More specifically, by interviewing music professionals who either represent or interact with several new forms and approaches of intermediation, numerous conclusions were extracted as regards the ways of value creation within the industry. Based on a theoretical framework which was focused on the changes and the developments in the music industry, the questions were asked and presented throughout the research analysis. Ultimately, with the aforementioned research, this thesis project aimed to answer its main research question: How do music intermediaries add value in music's production chain? Hence, is intermediation still a vital part of the music business and in that case, towards which ways intermediaries shape their models in order to remain profitable? Apart from the above-mentioned research question and its respective research problem, the research tried to provide an in-depth perspective of the new developments in the music industry. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that as every research, this project has its own limitations. Accordingly, the field of music intermediation was approached holistically in order to explain the changes and the necessities in intermediaries as a cultural concept which is vital for art and creative industries. Hence, it may offer an analysis of music intermediation's profitability yet in order to understand the changes as well as the terms of viability in every aspect of the industry (such as the record or publishing companies) it is necessary for further research to focus on each one of these aspects individually. In addition, interviewees represented different groups of intermediaries (live music operators, music journalists, sound engineers, record executives) and thus every one of them confronts the industry from a different position. Similarly each one of the aforementioned intermediation types has its own additional history of changes and developments.

Subsequently, the research was conducted in between two main conflicting theoretical views, trying simultaneously to provide an efficient insight as regards the current role of cultural intermediaries as well as the direction that contemporary music industry follows. Thus, on one hand there were numerous writers who suggested that digitalization means the end of intermediate oligopolies and the rise of a more direct and democratized relation between artists/producers and listeners/consumers (Young & Collins, 2010; Hracs, 2015). On the other hand there is a strong theoretical background which suggests the importance of intermediation in cultural production (Bourdieu; 1984) as a field of people who essentially direct and control the progress of creative industries (Negus, 2002). Thus, the project's design was based on particular propositions and hence there were assumptions related with the transformations that the web brings to intermediaries and the changes of their role towards both profitable and unprofitable directions. Moreover it was assumed that digitalization does not completely eliminate intermediaries although it transforms their power allocation within the industry and therefore it was pursued a holistic approach trying to understand the balances and the counterbalances of music intermediation. Similarly, the core of this project also balances between the business aspect of the issue and the cultural or sociological meanings that several writers suggested (Bourdieu, 1993; Negus, 2002; Hesmondhalgh, 2006).

Nonetheless as the results suggest, music intermediaries continue to create value as they locate certain necessities while some manage to progress by adapting to the digital evolution. Thus, by understanding the current necessities as well as digitalization's impact, music intermediaries manage to create value by adding validity and offering technical skills or

professionalism. Subsequently, intermediaries seem to be in a position to monetize experience and reputation, two basic elements that work essentially for artists who pursue large audience engagement along with a successful music career. Furthermore, deep knowledge of the new digital frames in music business is a synonym to digital literacy; a factor that requires the experience that some types of intermediaries can add. In addition, access to stardom, seems to be a procedure more complicated than online reputation as intermediaries manage to achieve stakeholders' management offering aspiring artists a valuable network while technological aspects such as studio equipment or advertising require considerable time and money investments; two sides that artists struggle with.

Consequently, diving deeper in the research question and its respective sub-questions and propositions of this project, there are numerous aspects that could be discussed. Initially, focusing on the main question that the research process tries to answer we can detect variety of ways as well as key elements that help intermediaries to remain relevant on the music industry despite the direct communication that the web offers. In other words, it can be concluded that even though social media and online networks provided a number of tools which seemingly were perceived as the answer to the industry's oligopolies, traditional gatekeepers manage to present aspects that so far surpass these digital transformations. Accordingly, after an in depth read of the results we could conclude that through the following elements or ways, music intermediaries manage to remain relevant in the aftermath of industry's digitalization:

Technical skills and proficiency: Asking interviewees to detect the forms which help them to monetize their services, the overwhelming majority referred to the ability of providing technical services and knowledge that it requires year to be obtained by artists. Thus, it can be concluded that music industry, as every industry has its own industrial standards, which cannot be reached individually as successful records require in depth knowledge or technical skills such as mixing, recording, sound engineering, marketing and management expertise.

Cultural knowledge: As the results indicate, music as an art and its construction it based on several cultures, sub-cultures and different perspectives. Hence, by focusing on music as an industry and always based on the findings we can conclude that each music genre is correlated with different forms of customers' behavior and listeners' engagement. As that indicates, many of the music intermediaries manage to take advantage of their long-time music experience in order to understand the needs and ethics of both artists and audience in correlation with different cultural communities.

Networking and Accessibility: Another critical aspect of music intermediation as it was examined through the interviews it is the role of professional networks and accessibility. In other words, the music industry is a multifunctional environment where the access is not guaranteed just by distribution. Subsequently, music's monetization is based on stakeholders management and access to particular fields such festivals (or other types of music events) and traditional media. In particular, as it was mentioned in the theoretical framework and the results, traditional media such as the radio continue to have an impact as regards promotion and listeners' engagement. Subsequently, expert networks of music media intermediaries, advertisers and record executives, occupy the intermediate field between artists/producers and large audiences. This form of occupation maintains the necessity for artists to collaborate with intermediaries as well as to share their revenues in order to rise towards stardom or at least to ensure viable profits.

Validity: An eventual aspect of artists' success and profitability is reputation. Through reputation artists manage to remain relevant for the industry or their respective audiences whereas they ensure professional longevity and long-term engagement. Thus, according to the findings, the given reputation of every artist cannot be obtained by digital systems such as suggestion algorithms or a simple YouTube presence. Subsequently as many of the interviews indicate, artists reputation is strictly related with validity; a factor that artists cannot reach without the help of external gatekeepers such as the music intermediaries. Hence, professionals such as music journalists, or event promoters, ensure through their own reputation and expertise that the quality of the music product deserves the audience's attention and similarly providing validity to the artists' activity.

Proceeding to the sub-questions as they were analyzed in the introduction of this project, we could initially provide an efficient answer based on the above. At first, the elements of necessity as they were remarked in the results indicate that intermediaries remain in a vital position as regards the industry. Thus, the complexity of the industry's functions as well as the need of expertise that the digital fields (such as digital marketing and social media engagement) require, help intermediaries to remain necessary for the efficient, production, distribution, promotion and monetization of the music product. In particular, and in relation with the second sub-question of this project, according to the findings, intermediaries manage to add value in almost every aspect of music's cultural production. Thus, from the assurance of the industry standards during the recording stage to the advanced skills of event promotion and management at products' delivery stage, intermediaries add their expertise in order to bring efficient results. Ultimately, the aforementioned conclusions do not negate the impact of digitalization in the industry. Subsequently, intermediaries remain vital and thus they are obliged to deal with both new advantages and obstacles whereas aspects such as self-education help them to develop technical skills easier and with lower costs. Moreover, their role becomes more international as social media create the base for a rising global market where intermediaries, artists and other individuals can establish professional transactions regardless their location. Eventually, changes in the form of music product such as visualization offer music intermediaries a new space to occupy such as independent cinematography and video making. Finally, their role becomes more significant as the visualization of music and the current ease of music production and distribution creates a new pool of aspiring artists with ambitions of success and stardom

In conclusion, digitalization causes a massive change in every aspect of music industry. As it was mentioned above many believe that that's the end of intermediation (Young & Collins, 2010) and the rise of independents. Yet contrary to a number of delusions that the web creates, digitalization not only transforms the advantages of intermediates but also creates new necessities while old necessities remain the same. Now intermediaries can locate these needs and adapt to the digital evolution. Furthermore, the analytical read of these phenomena challenges the aspect of cultural intermediation in general. As digital communication becomes more direct and while users gain access to content creation transforming themselves from receivers to transmitters, the media and communication industry is obliged to reconsider the way it positions itself among audiences. Thus, cultural intermediation becomes an essential issue for art, entertainment and communication. In the same way musicians can now distribute their music independently, individuals in other fields can create and transmit their content online either it is comedy, opinion, news or any other type of multimedia information. Subsequently, as this research suggests, it is crucial for intermediaries in every field of the

cultural production to reevaluate at first what makes them relevant for their fields, at second their adaptability in digital transformation and at third their profits channels. Three major factors for intermediaries to reach the core value of creative industries, the prosperity of art.

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APPENDIX

Music Business intermediates

Music Executives

Theme 1: Introduction/ Warm up questions

1. What is your job title?
2. What kind of services do you provide?
3. For how long have you been doing this job?
4. Which are the advantages and the disadvantages of your occupation?

Theme 2: Music Business, intermediation and digital transformation

1. What kind of changes have you noticed in the music industry throughout the last decade(s), can you define them?
2. Did the web transform your business operation? If so in which ways?
3. Would you be able to operate before few decades?
4. Could you define any obstacles or challenges in your service's future?
5. Does your services adapts in the current digital transformations? If so in which way?
6. Did the social media bring new aspects in your operation? If so can you define them?

Theme 3: The necessity of contemporary intermediation.

1. Could you define the elements which make you important for the music production chain?
2. Online distribution adds or erases necessities?
3. Digital networks offer music producers numerous ways to produce and distribute their product on their own, could you detect any gaps in this process.
4. What makes difficult for your (intermediate) service to be skipped by an individual?

Theme 4: Music intermediation and new opportunities
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1. Do you apply any digital tools in order to make your service more efficiently? If so could you name or describe them?
2. Can you define any threats that digitalization may bring to contemporary music business?
3. Could you define the prospects that digitalization may bring in music intermediation?
4. In which way contemporary music intermediation could develop music production/distribution/consumption?

Selected interviewees background

Name of the interviewee and the company	Background.	Dates of interviews
Antonis Villiotis	Head director of Feelgood Records, former international A&R director and former commercial director in Sony music entertainment.	26/4/2018
Christos Nebotakis,	Founder, director of a music video production company, cinematographer.	24/4/2018
Thomas Zevakis, Mixdown	Head director of music production unit and label.	29/4/2018
Antonis Konstantaras	Head director and founder of a cassette label, music journalist	29/4/2018
Nikos Pantazopoulos	Coordinator at a live music operator, promoter	30//4/2018
Petros Vinakos	Director of a music production unit	23/4/2018
Leonidas Antonopoulos	Head director of Greek public music radio Kosmos Fm	23/5/2018
Vaggelis Ananidis	Music editor, head of music website, music journalist	23/5/2018
Christos Vekris	Sound engineer, consultant	1/6/2018
Manolis Manoliadis	Executive producer, sound engineer, label representative	1/6/2018

Concept 3: The necessity of contemporary intermediation. Question: Could you define the elements which make you important for the music production chain?

Open Code	Properties	Examples of interviewees' words.
Network	Experience, long time, connections	Lack of connections, no matter the talent, long-time stakeholders relationships
Access	Festivals, organization, promotion	Given benefits, access in promoters and managers, blogging
Management	Time saving, representation, priority	Two persons are not enough, can't run a label
Technical knowledge	Ability to mix and master, confidence, result	They don't believe in themselves, you can't record in your room
Kickstart	Money, funding	You need a few millions boost

Concept 2: Music Business, intermediation and digital transformation. Question: Did the social media bring new aspects in your operation? If so can you define them?

Open Codes	Properties	Examples of interviewees' words
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Stakeholders' relations	Accessibility, availability	I never thought they would reply, brings you in contact with other artists, now you can advertise your business easier, international collaboration
Youtube	Knowledge, tutorials, education	I could watch 35 tutorials and learn how to make a song, everyone uploads a video titled how to mix rock music, I can learn things, YouTube exists because record companies allow to exist, people watch, don't listen anymore, somebody can listen to my work
Promotion	Success, fame, access	They seek after fame, it is nice to believe that you can make it, competition, chaotic information
The Web	Connection, network, market, ever changing field	It makes them want success, the web it is constantly moving

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
Network, access, management, technical knowledge, kick-start	Connections, Skills, Investment	Professionalism
Stakeholder' relations, YouTube, promotion, the web	Contacts, audience engagement, promotion	Communication